



outdoors

Outdoor Program Planning Resource Guide

Guide for troop leaders,
volunteers, and caregivers
to use as a resource to help
plan outdoor adventures
with their Girl Scouts.

girl scouts 
of colorado



OUTDOOR PROGRAM PLANNING RESOURCE GUIDE

Girl Scouts of Colorado developed this guide for troop leaders, volunteers, and caregivers to use as a resource to help plan their next outdoor adventure with their Girl Scouts.

Girl Scouts love spending time outdoors, exploring new places, and making memories. Connecting with the great outdoors in a girl-led setting is a big benefit of belonging to Girl Scouts. When girls spend quality time outdoors and increase their exposure to nature, they:

- Discover they can better solve problems and overcome challenges.
- Develop leadership skills, build social bonds, and are happier overall.
- Become team players and care more about protecting our environment.

[Outdoor progression](#) allows girls to learn the skills they need to become competent in the outdoors, including how to plan and organize outdoor activities at an age appropriate and girl-led pace. Acknowledge a girl's mastery of an outdoor skill and invite her to challenge herself further by taking the next step up and out! Use the [Girl Outdoor Readiness Assessment](#) to determine what outdoor activities are most appropriate for your troop's experience and skill level.

There are lots of ways for girls to participate in an outdoor experience as a Girl Scout in Colorado, anything from a day hike with their troop to a week at overnight camp!

Types of outdoor activities and programs may include a:

- Simple activity in your neighborhood, such as an [urban hike](#) or visit to a local park.
- Troop activity to work on parts of an outdoor badge or Journey.
- One-day troop field trip to go hiking, canoeing, horseback riding, rock climbing, or another special program – on your own or with a program vendor.
- Weekend overnight tent camping trip, staying at a GSCO property or campground.
- Staying in a cabin or lodge at a GSCO property.
- Attend a service unit or GSCO staff led Troop Camp weekend.
- Planning a higher skill level multi-day adventure, such as a backpacking trip, multi-day rafting overnight trip, etc.
- Attending a summer camp at Sky High or Tomahawk Ranch.

Girl Scout staff are here to help! Beyond your regional Volunteer Support Specialist, the [Outdoor Program, Camp, and Property teams](#) are happy to answer any questions and help plan outdoor activities.

PROGRAM RESOURCES

Outdoor Badges and Journeys

Girl Scouts has a long history of getting girls outdoors to create adventure and develop a lifelong appreciation for nature. Whether you're looking to explore your backyard or the backcountry, Girl Scouts outdoor badges and Journeys will strengthen girls' outdoor skills and ignite their interest in outdoor adventure and environmental stewardship.

- Refer to the [Outdoor Progression Chart](#) for a summary of progressive outdoor programming appropriate for different program levels.
- Use the [Badge Explorer](#) to preview all outdoor badges and Journeys by program level.

- Troop leaders can use [the Volunteer Toolkit](#) to see suggested lesson plans by badge.
- Ready to work on one of the High Adventure badges in trail running, hiking, rock climbing, or snow sports? [Check out the high – adventure badge activation guide](#) for tips on specialty gear, program providers, and planning for these activities.

Activity Specific Resources

In addition to working on outdoor badges and Journeys, there is opportunity for endless adventure and the challenge of discovering a new outdoor sport across Colorado.

- **Consult [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for your specific activity.** Each activity includes sections with resources to learn more about the activity, required equipment, how to prepare your troop for the activity, safety guidelines, and more.
- **To find a specific program vendor or location for an activity in Colorado,** browse [Colorado Outdoor Activities](#) and [Uncover Colorado](#) resources and suggestions.
- **Hiking is one of the most popular outdoor activities** in Colorado, and for good reason! Check out GSCO's [Guide to Urban Hiking](#) to get started and when you are ready to find hikes farther out we recommend [AllTrails](#), [Hiking Project](#), and [Mountain Project](#). All of these can be found on the web or downloaded as apps on your phone. Click on the trail or area you are interested in for a detailed description, difficulty rating, mileage, elevation gain, and more.
- **Ready to plan a take-action or highest award project?** Contact [Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado](#), your [local state park](#), or local regional park office to ask about upcoming volunteer opportunities or work with a ranger to develop your own project.
- **Looking for a little camp fun and silliness?** [Ultimate Camp Resource](#) is an amazing database full of activity plans and resources for [camp games](#) (everything from [nature games](#) to [large group](#)), [camp songs](#), [camp skits](#), [teambuilding](#), and even [videos demonstrating](#) how to run them!
- **Check out the [GSCO Anytime Activities](#) page** for council patch programs, Girl Scout community partners, outside group activities, and more suggestions for activities troops can do on their own.

Council Led Outdoor Programs

There are lots of opportunities to join in the camp and outdoor fun **through a GSCO staff or volunteer led program!**

- Check out the [GSCO Events Calendar](#) for upcoming outdoor activities and events that are open to troops or individual girls.
- [Sign up for summer camp!](#) Girl Scouts of Colorado offers residential overnight camp sessions from three days to two weeks in length at Tomahawk Ranch or Sky High Ranch, as well as volunteer-led day camps and staff led full weekend Troop Camps around the state.
- Attend an event with the [Outdoor Adventure Club!](#) The Outdoor Adventure Club (OAC) offers monthly high adventure programs around the state for girls in 6th – 12th grade who sign up individually. From mountain biking to canoeing to camping ... the OAC does it all!
- Plan your program with an overnight at Sky High Ranch or Tomahawk Ranch, and book [GSCO staff-led programming](#) in areas like a guided nature hike, archery, or outdoor skills.

Participate in a patch program on your own or with your troop!

- [GSCO Outdoor Skills Patch](#): This is a progressive four – level patch that encourages girls to master several outdoor skills such as knot tying, fire building, outdoor cooking, navigation, outdoor gear use, and more.

- [Get Outdoors Challenge Patch](#): This is a checklist challenge fun of fun outdoor activities in each season.
- [Meadow Mountain Ranch Nature Trail Patch](#): The Nature Trail at Meadow Mountain Ranch is a 1.25 mile one-way trail with 21 stops along the way. Trail-goers experience history, geology, biology, math, and science while following along with activity guides with unique lessons or games specific to each stop on the trail. There are four activities guides and accompanying four patches for each season – try to earn them all!
- [Girl Scout Tree Promise](#): Girl Scouts is setting out to plant five million trees across the country in five years, and to protect and honor new and existing trees. Not only is this great for wildlife, it will also help ease the effects of climate change. Download the toolkit, follow the activities, and take the Girl Scout Tree Promise to plant, protect, or honor trees to earn this patch.

LOCATION RESOURCES

Ready to travel for an outdoor experience beyond a one-day local hike or visit to a local park? Here is a list of resources to help you plan your next overnight outdoor adventure, from sleeping in a cabin to a tent.

Council Properties

Girl Scouts of Colorado has eight unique camp and property spaces across the state available for troops, Girl Scout groups, families, and outside user groups to rent. Take a hike in Rocky Mountain National park from Meadow Mountain Ranch, hang from a zip-line at Sky High Ranch and visit the farm animals or shoot a bullseye on the archery course at Tomahawk Ranch!

Visit the [GSCO Property page](#) to learn more about our properties. Ready to book? GSCO properties are available for reservations 365 days in advance. Visit [our property reservation website](#) to view pictures of lodging, check availability, and reserve a cabin or the whole property. Any questions on using GSCO properties can be emailed to property.reservations@gscolorado.org.

Campgrounds

Start with determining your group needs in a campground, consider:

- How rustic of facilities is your group prepared for? Campground bathrooms can range from pit toilets to full shower facilities.
- How much space does your group need? Do you need a group campground for 40 people or a couple sites for car camping with one small troop?
- What kind of camping equipment are you bringing?
- Will the site and location allow you to accommodate the programs you are planning? Is the site close to activities your group is interested in?
- What are your cooking and food storage plans?

After determining your group needs, you can then focus your campground search:

- [Colorado State Parks](#) and [National Parks](#) are excellent places for car camping, large groups, and backpacking trips. Some even have reservable cabins and yurts!
- Check out [Recreation.gov](#) or [ReserveAmerica](#) for private and national forest campgrounds. Here you can filter your search by site type, activities, amenities, and other topics.

Other Facilities

If GSCO properties are unavailable and your group is looking for a higher level of accommodations beyond a campground, but would still like to be close to outdoor activities, you could consider staying at a private facility such as a church, retreat center, ranch, etc. One example we like is [YMCA of the Rockies!](#)

INSTRUCTORS, VENDORS, AND GEAR

Qualified Instructors & Activity Experts

Some outdoor activities, such as canoeing or archery, require instructors with additional levels of training and certifications. Some outdoor badges, such as the Rock Climbing Adventure badge, recommend girls speak with an activity expert. An activity expert is someone who has a high level of documented personal or professional experience in a specific outdoor sport. Instructors or activity experts may be guides, vendors, outfitters, professional athletes, or even Girl Scout caregivers or volunteers.

Unsure if your activity needs an expert? Check out [Safety Activity Checkpoints!](#)

When vetting a qualified instructor or activity expert, consider their ability to:

- Have the appropriate training and/or documented experience.
- Provide, assemble, maintain, and store equipment.
- Create a safe space for girls and adults.
- Give clear directions to both girls and adults.
- Facilitate progressive, step-by-step age-appropriate program.
- Continually monitor safety throughout the activity.
- Respond appropriately and affectively to emergency situations.
- Overall, does this person have the knowledge and experience to make appropriate judgments concerning participants, equipment, facilities, supervision of girls, and safety procedures for the activity?

Program Vendors & Outfitters

As you are planning activities and trips for your troop, you may consider using guides, vendors, or outdoor outfitters. These can be excellent resources for ensuring that you and your troop have a safe and impactful experience, especially for high adventure activities such as climbing, rafting, horseback riding, or zip-lining.

Guidelines in working with outdoor program vendors:

- Whenever possible, make any activity girl-led, even researching and finding a program vendor! Researching and setting up a program with a vendor helps girls develop skills in comparing prices, professional phone calls, exploring online businesses, and setting the tone with the vendor program to treat girls as leaders.
- Share the activity appropriate section in [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) with vendors for them to review the requirements for certifications, equipment, and other activity guidelines they will be providing.
- GSCO requires a Certificate of Insurance from any outside vendors. Contact your vendor at least 30 days prior to the activity to collect a copy of the Certificate of Insurance and email to insurance@gscolorado.org. The facility or vendor which hosts your activity (for example, a whitewater rafting company, riding stable, or tour bus for transportation) should carry general liability insurance. A facility which carries valid general liability insurance has almost always been examined for risk by its insurance carrier. If a place does not carry general liability insurance, it's a red flag. It may not be safe, so it would be best to select another place.
- Ensure any waivers from the vendor are filled out by parents/caregivers, not troop leaders.
- Generally, program vendors are used for a higher risk or skill level outdoor activity, like horseback riding or rock climbing. High risk outdoor activities require additional approval by GSCO, [submit for activity approval here](#).

How to find outdoor vendors:

Check out the [GSCO Anytime Activities](#) page for a list of vendors familiar with Girl Scout programming, some with special pricing and activities for Girl Scouts.

If looking for a specific activity vendor, start with searching by activity type on the lists below, or the activity resource section in [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).

- [Colorado Outdoor Activities](#)
- [Uncover Colorado Activities](#)

Outdoor Gear, Clothing and Equipment

Renting Gear

Buying new outdoor can be an overwhelming barrier to trying a new outdoor sport. Gear rental can be a great option if you are new to an outdoor activity and don't have the funds or interest in investing in your own set. Rental resources include:

- Check with your local service unit and nearby troops to see if you can borrow from a service unit supply, or do a gear trade with other troops.
- [GSCO Denver outdoor equipment](#) rental includes tents, water jugs, pop-ups, and more for your next camping trip. Not in Denver? Check with your regional Girl Scout office to see if they have any outdoor gear to rent.
- You can also check to see if you have a local outdoor gear rental shop in your community or in the area you are traveling to. No rental shop near you or your destination? No problem! Shops like [OutdoorsGeek](#) and [Mountain Side Gear & Rental](#) will ship gear to you for your trip. They have everything you need for your camping or backpacking trip.
- If you need a bike, paddling gear, or a ski package, check for a local rental shop or for places like [Epic Mountain Gear](#) with multiple locations in Colorado.
- Your local [REI](#) or other outdoor retailer may also offer equipment rentals.

Purchasing Gear

Thrift and consignment stores are excellent places to look for gently used outdoor clothing or even specialized equipment. Places like Goodwill or Arc can be good places to start, especially for clothing, but if you are hoping to find a great deal on gently used gear, you should also check out the following outdoor consignment shops.

- [Gearage](#) in Fort Collins
- [Wilderness Exchange](#) in Denver
- [The Outdoorsman's Attic](#) in Denver
- [Mountain Exchange](#) in Idaho Springs
- [Mountain Equipment Recyclers](#) in Colorado Springs
- [The Gear Junction](#) in Grand Junction

Outdoor retailers and outfitters are another obvious option for finding the gear you need. Watch for sales or for special events such as community gear swaps. For example, REI members can take advantage of [Garage Sales](#) where REI sells returned gear at deep discounts. Otherwise, the best time to buy gear is typically at end of season sales or inventory sales. Rental shops will often sell used equipment so they can make room for new inventory. Outdoor gear can be expensive, but if you are patient and keep an eye out for special events and sales you can find affordable and quality pieces.

SAFETY AND TRAINING

ACTIVITY APPROVAL

Due to the higher required skill level and risk, some outdoor programs require additional approval from GSCO. Activities requiring additional approval are indicated on p.20 of the [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#). You can request activity approval as soon as you know the details of your planned activity, but no later than 30 days prior to the activity. [Complete the activity approval form here](#). Review some FAQ's and learn about the [activity approval form at this blog post](#).

SKILLS AND TRAINING

Make sure you are familiar with the [GSCO Adult Volunteer Outdoor Training Progression](#). Review the chart at this link for resources in online and in person topics in training including girl readiness for outdoor activities, Leave No Trace skills, campsite set up, fire building, outdoor skills, and more.

For more in-depth or higher level outdoor skill training like preparing for a backpacking trip or wilderness survival, volunteers may be interested in going on guided trips or taking classes with another organization like [REI Outdoor School](#) or the [Colorado Mountain Club](#).