

# North Cascades

Ross Lake and Lake Chelan

North Cascades National Park  
Ross Lake National Recreation Area  
Lake Chelan National Recreation Area  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## No Mushroom Collecting in the North Cascades National Park Complex



*(Amanita — poisonous)*

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### Fungus among us

In order to protect the area's outstanding natural qualities, mushroom picking and/or collecting is not permitted in the National Park Service areas comprising the North Cascades Complex. Less is known about the ecological role of fungus than about that of plants and animals. History has many examples of overconsumption of timber, fish, and wildlife. We can not afford to make the same mistake with fungus.

When scientists discovered one of the world's largest organisms, a fungus on the Olympic Peninsula, the media coverage magnified the Pacific Northwest's reputation as a land of fantastic mushrooms. Commercial harvesting of mushrooms on public lands has grown in recent years and is now a multi-million dollar business in the Pacific Northwest. Recreational mushroom collection has also undergone expansive growth.

There are many compelling reasons to ban mushroom collection in this region. The many forms and hues of the delicate mushrooms add mystery and beauty to the forest. What is beauty to our eyes is much more to the forest ecosystem; We have only begun to understand the interconnectedness of fungi with the whole forest. Mushrooms disperse spores so that future mushrooms can develop. Fungi fill a number of important ecological roles and contribute to the strength and flexibility of the entire forest community.

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### The Mushroom and the Fungus

A mushroom is the fruiting body of a fungus. The actual body of the fungus spreads out in the soil or in decaying wood. When you see a mushroom, realize that there is a difference between the mushroom and the fungus. For example, if you found a ring of mushrooms in the forest, the actual body of the fungus lies under the ground, interlaced with the soil, while the mushrooms serve as vessels to disperse the spores of the fungus. Without the mushroom, many fungi would have no way to reproduce and disperse through the forest.

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## Fungus is a Forest Friend

- Fungi play a key role in the forest community. They decompose dead or diseased trees and brush, releasing nutrients for future generations of plants and animals. Without nutrient recycling by fungi, the fertility of the soil would decrease. The forest would become stagnant.
- Fungi increase forest variety by helping create snags (standing dead trees) and downed logs. Insects feed on the decaying wood and are a critical source of food for small animals. Snags and downed logs also provide homes for many different kinds of animals, such as woodpeckers, salamanders, insects, bears, bats and raccoons.
- Mushrooms are food for many woodland critters, including deer and squirrels. Some mushrooms, called truffles, mature underground. Their rich odors entice flying squirrels to dig down and eat them. Owls, in turn, prey on the flying squirrels, making mushrooms and fungus critical links in the food web.
- A little known but extremely important role some species of fungi play is in their interdependent relationship with plants. While (mycorrhizal) fungi absorb phosphorous and nitrogen from the ground and provide these nutrients to plants, plants return the favor by providing simple sugars and vitamins back to fungi.
- Another reason not to collect mushrooms is that many contain deadly poisons. Even experts are unable to distinguish some edible forms from poisonous look-a-likes. This is particularly true for small mushrooms. Other mushrooms spoil quickly and become poisonous.

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## Please Protect Your Park



- North Cascades National Park and Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas are collectively managed as the North Cascades National Park Service Complex. The National Park Service is mandated to conserve scenery, natural and historic objects and wildlife. Most of this region is also designated wilderness; where people visit but do not remain, a place untrammelled by humankind.
- National and state forests, on the other hand, are under different management designations and are administered for a variety of uses, from lumber production to wildlife protection. Regulations on collecting mushrooms differ there.
- Some collectors aid their search for mushrooms with leaf blowers or garden rakes. Both can damage fragile life on the forest floor. The combination of commercial and recreational collection of mushrooms poses threats to the quality of natural areas.
- The gathering, collecting or harvesting of all mushrooms is prohibited within the North Cascades National Park Service Complex. Within the Complex, these activities are in violation of the law (36 C.F.R. Ch. 1 § 2.1) and are subject to a fine. Please see a map for boundary locations or contact a park ranger at a visitor center or ranger station for more information.

**Help Us Out, Leave Them Be**