

Alaska Backpacking and Packrafting

Equipment List

Welcome to NOLS! It's important to choose the right equipment for any outdoor adventure. This list is designed to help you make smart decisions about the gear you take on your course.

When you arrive, your instructors will look through the equipment you've brought and help you decide what to take into the field. You'll then go into our Outfitting Department to rent or purchase any remaining items. We've made every effort to ensure that this equipment list is reflective of what you will need on your course, but your actual needs will vary depending on season and instructor judgment.

Here are some thoughts to guide you as you pack:

- **First, use gear you already own!** You'll be comfortable in tried-and-true clothing. Bring more layers than you think you'll need; your instructors will help you choose your best options. You can always leave items in storage at the branch.
- **Second, rent key items from NOLS.** We recommend that you rent, rather than purchase, several "big ticket" items, such as a sleeping bag and backpack. While you are not obligated to rent gear from us, there are several reasons why we suggest it. Our rental gear is high quality and chosen specifically for the heavy use it receives on courses. Rental prices are reasonable, so you can try out gear and make informed decisions on future adventures. After your course, you may purchase any of the items you rented; this is a great way to begin building your personal gear closet. Many instructors and students use NOLS rental gear rather than their own.
- **Third, purchase specific items from our Outfitting Department.** To make shopping simple, we offer basic kitchen utensils (mug, bowl with lid, spoon, 32-ounce water bottle), personal care items (lip balm, sunscreen, bug spray), and camping sundries (headlamp, batteries, lighter). NOLS is a not-for-profit organization, and revenue from our Outfitting Department goes to serve the mission of the school.

- **Fourth, visit a local outdoor store.** Most gear shops, from REI to mom-and-pop shops, are familiar with NOLS and its courses. We encourage you to keep the tags on all equipment and clothing, and the receipt at home, so that you may later return any items you don't use.

Equipment Fees

In addition to your course tuition, you will pay an equipment deposit. This deposit will be applied directly to the charges you incur for gear rentals and purchases. At the end of your course, you will be billed for any amount that exceeds your equipment deposit, or refunded any balance.

Quality over Quantity

At NOLS, we fundamentally believe that you don't need to own a lot of expensive gear to live and travel comfortably in the backcountry. By purchasing high-quality items and learning to care for them, you're making a lifetime investment. Spend money on the few items that really matter, but don't get lured into splurging on the trendiest fabrics or unnecessary gadgets. Used, consignment clothing and equipment stores can be a great place to find quality, lightly worn items as well.

Questions?

Please contact our staff at NOLS Alaska by phone (907) 745-4047 or email alaska_equipment@nols.edu.

How to Use this List

Items under the **Required** heading are items that you must either bring yourself or rent or purchase from NOLS as available. Items under the **Optional** heading are not required, and you may bring them from home, buy, or rent from NOLS as available. If you see an **X** in the price column, that means that an item is not available for rent or for purchase as indicated.

Upper Body Clothing			
You need at least three insulating layers, a windproof layer, a rain layer and a t-shirt. Make sure your layers fit comfortably over each other. If you get cold easily, we suggest that you take four insulating layers, or three layers plus a vest.			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes

Required Items			
Long Sleeve Hiking Shirt	X	\$40-80	A long-sleeve, lightweight, non-cotton hiking shirt, preferably with a hood for sun, wind and bug protection. Merino wool, capilene and other breathable synthetic fabrics. We sell Patagonia Capilene Hoodies.
Long Underwear Top	X	\$35-110	One mid-weight synthetic or performance wool to wear under a drysuit while paddling. (Examples: Mountain Hardwear Extend, Patagonia Capilene, Ibex wool, Icebreaker wool)
Fleece Jacket	X	\$55-160	Light- to mid-weight fleece jacket that fits over your base layers. (Examples: Mountain Hardwear Microchill, Patagonia R1)
Insulated Jacket	\$35	\$190	A warm, synthetic-filled jacket that fits over your base layers, ideally with a hood. We rent the Mont-Bell Hooded Thermawrap.
Wind Shirt	\$20	\$75	Nylon wind shell, roomy enough to fit comfortably over your base layers. Excellent protection in dense bushes and from bugs. (Example: Patagonia Houdini) We rent a NOLS-custom nylon pullover.
Rain Jacket	\$35	X	Waterproof, breathable rain jacket. Your rain jacket should be roomy enough to fit comfortably over all upper-body layers. Ponchos are not acceptable. We rent Gore-Tex Pro Shell rain jackets.
Drysuit	\$200	X	Waterproof, breathable fabric with latex gaskets at wrists. The neck closure can be either a latex gasket or a neoprene cuff. Pant legs with built-in waterproof or latex socks are mandatory. We highly recommend renting our lightweight drysuits, as many others may be too heavy to be appropriate.
Neoprene Socks	\$5	X	Thin neoprene socks worn on top of built-in drysuit socks to provide some warmth and to protect waterproof fabric from puncture. NRS 0.5mm Wetsocks. Thicker than 2mm will make shoe fit challenging. Neoprene socks are included with a NOLS Drysuit rental, or can be rented separately.
Lower Body Clothing			
You need one to two lower-body insulating layers that fit comfortably over each other and underneath your hiking or rain pants. Example combination: Expedition-weight long underwear underneath insulated pants.			

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Long Underwear Bottoms (1-2 pairs)	X	\$35	Mid- or expedition-weight synthetic or performance wool is best. (Examples: Mountain Hardwear Extend, Patagonia Capilene, Ibex wool, Icebreaker wool)
Hiking Pants	\$20	\$65-75	Nylon hiking pants are recommended for protection from bugs and dense vegetation. We rent durable nylon shell pants, called wind pants.
Optional Items			
Rain Pants	\$35	X	We rent Gore-Tex Pro Shell rain pants.
Miscellaneous Clothing			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Sun Hat or Baseball Cap	X	\$20-25	Should be wide-brimmed to protect from sun.
Warm Hat and/or Buff	\$10	\$30	A warm, synthetic hat that will fully cover your ears, or a Buff that can double as a hat. Bring both if you tend to get cold.
Glove Liners	X	\$10-25	Lightweight polypropylene gloves may be layered with heavier gloves for warmth or worn alone for sun protection.
Underwear/ Bra (2 pairs underwear, 1 bra)	X	\$35-40	Undergarments made from merino wool or polypropylene wick moisture away from your skin and are highly recommended.
Footwear			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Light to Mid-weight Hiking Shoe	X	X	Hiking shoes of some sort are required, but the traditional-style heavyweight leather boots are not allowed. These shoes will double as your hiking and boating footwear. Please read the footwear selection guide at the end of this list.
Camp Shoe			Quick-dry, closed-toe shoes. We highly recommend, and sell, either a pair of Totes

			ankle-high boots or classic Crocs slip-on clogs without holes.
Hiking Socks (3-4 pairs)	X	\$15-20	Must be 75 to 100% wool, merino wool, synthetic. No wool/cotton blends.
Optional Items			
Camp Shoe (option 2)	X	\$30-100	Waterproof socks. By layering dry socks, a waterproof sock, and your existing wet hiking shoes, this system can act like a dry camp shoe without extra weight. Gore's Rocky Socks, Kokatat's Hydrus Launch Socks, Rab's Vapor Barriers.
Sleeping Gear			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Sleeping Bag	\$60	\$220	A 15-30 degree F sleeping bag or quilt. Down is suitable if paired with a lightweight waterproof compression sack and prior experience managing wet conditions. We stock synthetic-filled sleeping bags with a temperature rating of 15 degrees F or colder.
Sleeping Pad	X	\$60-100	We recommend and sell full-length inflatable sleeping pads. (Example: Therm-a-rest Pro-Lite Small or Regular)
Sleeping Bag Stuff Sack	\$8	\$28-35	A compression stuff sack makes your sleeping bag smaller to pack (example: OR Ultralight Compression Sack). A no-compression stuff sack is fine too and weighs less (example: Granite Gear Air Compressor Stuff Sack).
Packs and Bags			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Internal Frame Pack	\$75	\$350-400	Internal frame backpack with a volume of 90 to 110 liters. We highly recommend renting our backpacks, as they fit our bulky packraft equipment well when hiking, and roll up nicely when stowed inside the packraft during river travel.
Small Stuff Sacks (1-2)	\$2	\$5-15	Used to organize items in your pack. Lightweight or waterproof are fine too and they weigh less (example: Outdoor Research Ultralight Stuff Sack).

Miscellaneous Items			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Bandana (1-2)	X	\$3	For multiple uses. 1 is highly recommended for hygiene use.
Lighter	X	\$1.50	Used to light stoves. Do not bring a zippo.
Eating Utensils	X	\$5-10	Tupperware type bowl, 1-2 pints. Lexan/plastic spoon or metal spork. Preference for foldable and/or lightweight bowls.
Eyeglass Retainer	X	\$6-10	Good brands are Chums and Croakies.
Mosquito Head Net	\$5	\$12	You can rent this if bugs will be a problem on your course.
Lip Balm	X	\$2.50	Stick or cream with sun protection.
Notebook and Pen/Pencil	X	\$6-12	A small spiral notebook is fine. Avoid hardcover. We sell a durable notebook with waterproof pages.
Prescription Glasses and Contact Lenses	X	X	If you wear prescription glasses or lenses, you should bring a spare set. Even if you wear contact lenses daily, plan to carry a pair of glasses into the field.
Sport Sunscreen	X	\$5-7	A tube or bottle of 2-4 oz. should be plenty. A sun protection factor of 30 or greater is necessary. A physical sun block such as zinc oxide is strongly recommended for people who burn easily. The course will share tubes.
Sunglasses	X	\$40-120	Durable with 100% UV protection.
Toilet Articles	X	\$3-6	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb/brush, moisturizer, prescription meds. Sample sizes of 2 oz. are preferable. No deodorant or excessive items. We have basic toiletries for sale in case you forget something at home.
Menstrual products	X	\$5-35	Required if you menstruate. Bring the products which work well for you, and bring slightly more supplies than you think you might need. This might mean tampons*, pads*, a menstrual cup*, or some combo thereof.
Watch	X	\$50	Bring a waterproof watch with an alarm even if you do not normally wear one.

Water Bottle	X	\$12-25	1L capacity, hard-sided or soft bladder with cap. We sell Platypus SoftBottle and Nalgene hard bottles. A reused plastic bottle, such as 1-liter Gatorade, is a great lightweight and cheaper option. We do not recommend a hose system for packrafting.
Optional Items			
Insect Repellent	X	\$6	If you have some and are willing to share, please bring. The course will share one or two 2-3 oz. bottles.
Camera	X	X	Bring a small, durable camera with plenty of extra batteries and memory cards. Your group may decide to only bring a few cameras and then share photos at the end of the course.
16 oz Nalgene Bottle	X	\$12	Highly recommended. Doubles as a hot drink vessel and backup water bottle, and increases water capacity to 1.5 L. We sell these with a NOLS logo.
Vitamins	X	X	Some folks prefer to supplement their diet with a multi-vitamin.
Trekking Poles (1 or 2)	X	\$70	Double telescoping or Z-Fold trekking poles. No non-adjustable poles, as they won't fit inside the packraft. We sell Black Diamond Trail Trekking telescoping poles.
Shared Group Equipment—NOLS will supply			
Expedition members share both the use of and the responsibility for the group gear that NOLS issues. NOLS charges only for group equipment lost or damaged. Keep in mind that NOLS evaluates gear from a number of perspectives beyond those that an individual user might consider. Performance, durability and simplicity are all contributing factors towards our gear selection.			
Tents Trowel or Shovel Stoves, Fuel Bottles & Fuel Maps Packrafts Drybag system Paddles PFDs River Safety Gear Helmets Bear Spray			

GPS
Repair Kits
Reference Books
Cooking Gear/Spice Kits
Soap and Hand Sanitizer

First Aid:
Our instructors carry adequate first aid kits. There is no need to bring your own.

Footwear Selection Guide

NOLS has been outfitting people with hiking shoes for many years and our priorities have remained the same: We want you to have footwear that provides adequate protection for your feet, that is durable enough to withstand weeks of rugged wear, and that provides reasonable comfort. Many boots and shoes available on the market do not meet these criteria.

"The nature of packrafting means that your footwear will need to meet diverse needs. Your shoes will support your feet and ankles while backpacking in rugged, off-trail terrain. On the river, the same shoes need to fit comfortably paired with a drysuit and be appropriate for river travel. Finally, you'll need something to wear around camp at the end of the day, which could either be your packraft shoes worn with waterproof socks, or a pair of Crocs.

Here are some features to look for in trail shoes and lightweight hiking boots:

- A sole that provides good traction but is still flexible
- A Gore-Tex liner is not recommended. Your foot will get wet when packrafting and the liner will slow drying time.
- "Comfortable, slightly roomy fit with your preferred hiking socks. When worn with drysuit built-in socks and neoprene socks, fit will feel snug and you may need to remove the shoe insoles. Shoes that are too small are a common cause of blisters and cold feet."
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The following list of acceptable footwear is not exhaustive. It is to be used as a guide to the general type of footwear acceptable for your course. It is fine to substitute a similar shoe for one of the types listed here. NOLS recommends looking for lightweight low or mid hiking shoes or off-trail running shoes. The classic hiking boot is too stiff to fit appropriately in the packrafts.

Lightweight hiking shoe or trail runners:

Merrell: Chameleon Low and Mid, Moab Low and Mid, Refuge Core

Altra: Lone Peak Hiker
Salomon: XA, Speed Cross
La Sportiva: Wildcat, TX 3
Brooks: Cascadia
Keen: Targhee, Voyageur