Safety Activity Checkpoint
Recreational Tree Climbing
HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY: Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required

Council Approval: Required
Activity Permitted For: J C S A

About Recreational Tree Climbing
In recreational tree climbing, girls explore the beauty of living trees with guided facilitator support. Recreational tree climbers use ropes, harnesses, saddles, and climbing techniques to ascend into the crowns of trees and the canopies of forests. Care should be taken to keep climbers and trees safe.

Climbing may be done on branches that have at least 6 inches of living tissue. A full inspection of the health of the tree and surrounding area must be made.

Leave No Trace
While climbing in natural areas, it’s important to respect the environment. Read tips from the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics.

The Global Organization of Tree Climbers has an interactive map to help you find tree-climbing programs.

Learn More:
- Leave No Trace
- Tree Climbing International

Include Girls with Disabilities and/or Special Needs
Talk to girls with disabilities and/or special needs and/or their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. If visiting a national park, contact the park in advance. Ask about accommodating people with disabilities and/or special needs.
Additional Resources:  
Check out Move United to learn about adaptive climbing.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

- **Choose a certified instructor.** The facilitator needs to have documented experience in leading and teaching tree climbing.
- **File required permits.** Climbing is also forbidden on any trees in the U.S. National Parks; State parks however, may differ—check with your local parks service. And of course, ask for property owners’ permission before scaling any trees on private land.
- **Inspect equipment.** The instructor will inspect all equipment before each use. Equipment will be well maintained. A use log will track wear, stress, and deterioration of gear. Outside professionals should periodically inspect all trees and equipment. A written equipment monitoring and retirement process needs to be followed.
- **Ensure the instructor climbs all routes before participants begin.**
- **Ensure only instructors clip participants in and out of the tie-in system.**
- **Ensure a process for managing safety and performing rescues is in place.**
- **Ensure helmet-only areas are clearly designated** in order to protect participants and passersby from falling debris.
- **Get a weather report.** On the morning of the activity, check a reliable weather source to determine if conditions are appropriate. Be prepared to alter the activity plan if weather conditions change. Participants must not climb when trees or gear are wet. In the event of a storm, take shelter away from all trees and other tall objects. Find the lowest point in an open flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet, and place hands on knees with head between them.
- **Participants should receive instruction.** Instructors must describe the climb’s objectives, safety procedures, and hazards to the participants. Climbers learn:
  - Readiness and action commands
  - Muscle warmup and stretching techniques
  - Safety procedures and site-specific hazards

Safety Gear

- **Climbing equipment**—such as ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware, and helmets—designed for this purpose and appropriate for the size of the user
- **Climbing helmets** worn by all participants who will be more than 6 feet off the ground or on belay; helmets must be approved by the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA)
- **Sturdy shoes**

**Girl Scouts of Northern California’s Approval Process for Recreational Tree Climbing**

Recreational Tree Climbing is considered a high-adventure activity and must be pre-approved by the council.

- **Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form:** Submit the online Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form to council at least 4-6 weeks prior to your activity. Gather the following information to complete this form:
  - Confirmation that your chaperones are registered members of Girl Scouts of Northern California and have a current background check. Troop Leaders can find this information in their Volunteer Toolkit.
  - Name of First Aider and a copy of their current CPR/First Aid certification card. Certification needs to be renewed every two years. If you are hiking or backpacking farther than 30 minutes from a medical facility, please have the information of the member, who is certified in Wilderness First Aid, accompanying your troop.
  - Confirm that the necessary online and in-person courses have been completed for this trip. You can find more information or register for these courses in your Volunteer Learning Portal in the section called Trip & Outdoor Advisor.
    - The **Camp Out course** is required for all camping trips that involve advanced outdoor cooking or camping trip with girls to a campground or other non-GSNorCal outdoor facility for longer than 1
night without indoor plumbing and electricity. Girls should have already had practice sleeping and cooking outdoors.

- The **Extended Trips course** is required for troops traveling three (3) nights or more.
- The **Backpacking course** is required before you take girls on an overnight backpacking adventure.

- **High-Adventure Approved Vendor List**: GSNorCal troops/groups must select a high-adventure vendor from the High-Adventure Approved Vendor List, which consists of organizations that meet Girl Scouts safety and insurance requirements for the activity. For the safety of our members, before a troop uses a high-adventure site/vendor for a troop or service unit event, the council must approve the high-adventure site/vendor. This process is designed to ensure a safe experience and protect the council’s and volunteer's legal interests.

- **Adding high-adventure facilities to the Approved Vendor List**: If your preferred vendor is not listed on the High-Adventure Approved Vendor list, please follow the simple steps in the Volunteer Essentials for adding high-adventure vendors.
