



WHAT IF Cat If?

Feline Dream Machine
2026



WHAT IF SURVIVAL GUIDE



What If 2026 Survival Guide

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WELCOME



We're thrilled to have you join us for a paw-sitively extraordinary cat-venture!

What If, previously called Burn in the Forest, is an annual event inspired by and rooted in the [10 Principles of Burning Man](#), where everything at our gathering is created by participants as a form of self-expression and as a gift to each participant.

With a rich hiss-tory spanning over two decades, What If has evolved into a vibrant community-driven experience. Participants come together to practice radical inclusion, while co-creating and exploring awe-inspiring art installations, interactive theme camps and workshops, performances, and so much more.

As we gather in this beautiful location in Merritt, BC, the safety of all attendees is paramount for us to create an environment where everyone can freely express themselves.

This What If 2026 Survival Guide has been thoughtfully curated to provide you with valuable information to safely navigate What If 2026, including guidance on personal well-being, consent, fire safety, minors, and other crucial elements. We encourage you to read this Survival Guide carefully (THAT MEANS PLEASE READ IT! Yes, all of it!)*, read emails leading up to the event, and take responsibility for your safety and the safety of those around you.

By actively participating and fostering a culture of care, we collectively create a memorable and transformative experience while also prioritizing the wellbeing of everyone involved. We're excited to embark on this journey with you! We look forward to embracing the spirit of the Burner culture as we celebrate the magic of What If!

**Note: The Survival Guide for the current year will be published about a month before the event, and some details may change. Please check the [Whatif.now](#) website and read the newsletter sent to ticket holders so that you have the most current information!*

Acknowledging the Indigenous Lands of the Nl̓eʔkepmx and Syilx People

As we come together for What If, we must acknowledge and show respect for the traditional territory of the Nl̓eʔkepmx and Syilx people who share title over this land. The local First Nations are collectively known as Scw'xmx, the People of the Creeks, one of those creeks being the Coldwater River that spans our event.



The banks of the Coldwater River have been home since time immemorial to the C'eletkwmx (also known as the Coldwater Band) of the Nt̓eʔkepmx Nation and the Spaxomin (also known as the Upper Nicola Band) of the Syilx Nation. We recognize the importance of honouring their enduring connection.

We invite you to consider the rich history and heritage of the Nt̓eʔkepmx and Syilx people. We encourage you to engage in meaningful conversations, listen to the voices of Indigenous communities, and strive to build respectful relationships. Let's enjoy What If while being mindful of the deep-rooted connections this land holds for the Indigenous communities who have lived here for countless years.

The 10 (+1) Principles of Burning Man

The 10 Principles of Burning Man aren't "rules" in the traditional sense (despite what some comments on social media may say!). They're cultural behaviours that underpin our event and reflect our shared values. The 10+1 Principles are the foundational roots of this community and our participation at What If, and many folk bring this ethos with them to the "default" world.

Like us humans, these principles aren't purrfect, but they're what set a Burning Man event apart from conventional raves and festivals. By choosing to attend a regional Burn, we ask you to strive to think about them, understand them, and apply them as best you can, wherever you can, at What If.



Radical Inclusion

Anyone may be a part of What If. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.



Decommodification

In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.



Gifting

What If is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value.



Radical Self-reliance

What If encourages the individual to discover, exercise, and rely on their inner resources.



Communal Effort

Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote, and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction.



Radical Self-expression

Radical self-expression arises from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.



Civic Responsibility

We value civil society. Community members who organize events should assume responsibility for public welfare and endeavour to communicate civic responsibilities to participants. They must also assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with local, provincial, and federal laws.



Leaving No Trace

Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather. We clean up after ourselves and endeavour, whenever possible, to leave such places in a better state than when we found them.



Participation

Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play. We make the world real through actions that open the heart.



Immediacy

Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most important touchstone of value in our culture. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, the reality of those around us, participation in society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers. No idea can substitute for this experience.



Consent

Considered as the “11th Principle” by some and as the “Zero Principle” that supports the other ten principles by others, consent respects the autonomy of the individual, who has the right to make their own choice about their own body, property, personal space and privacy. Read more about the [11th Principle: Consent](#).

CODE OF CONDUCT

All participants attending What If must adhere to the Greater Vancouver Interactive Arts Society (GVIAS) [Participant Code of Conduct](#), [linked here](#).

Respect Yourself

The environment and experience may push you in different ways than expected. Occasionally, you may feel uncomfortable, out of sorts, or even claw-ful. We trust that only you can fully understand your own comfort levels and personal boundaries. Please be conscious of your well-being and aware of your own needs. Practice self-care and remember the value of self-reliance in our community, but reach out to others for support if you need it. We want you to be feline fine!

Respect One Another

Be aware of your behaviour and choices, and how they impact other members of our community. Keep consent and personal autonomy at the forefront of all your interactions. Check in with yourself and others to practice mutual respect and consent. Confirm pronouns or use neutral ones, respect the name a person tells you that they go by, and thank other participants when they express boundaries! Check out the [Consent and Boundaries section](#) of the Guide for more on this important topic!



Respect Our Hosts, the Land, and the Surroundings

There are very few places that allow us to do what our community does. We're privileged to use this fur-midable space, and we need to take excellent care of it. Our actions will guide the future use of this beautiful site.

See something, Say Something

If something doesn't seem right, you are empowered to speak up and report the situation to the Production Team or the Rangers (they have radios). Producers reserve the right to remove participants who contradict the spirit of the Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct has been created by the community and we strive to create a healthy and respectful environment for everyone.

Inclusivity at What If

We strive to create an opening and welcoming environment for everyone at What If, as part of Burning Man's "Radical Inclusion" principle. Avoid making assumptions about people based on how you perceive them! You can support our 2SLGBTQIAP+ community members by offering your pronouns first when asking someone what their pronouns are, to avoid misgendering them, or refer to them without gender indicators. If you're not sure what name someone's using these days, just ask!

Assumption of Risk

By purchasing or accepting a ticket, attending, or participating in our event, you have or are entering into an Assumption of Risk ("waiver"). This waiver will impact your right to sue if you get hurt, so you should read it. Please click on [this link](#) to review the waiver.

Personal Responsibility

You're solely responsible for your own well-being, actions, and choices while at What If. You're responsible for your own safety and the safety of your property. What If assumes no liability for any injuries, accidents, or damages that may occur. If you're bringing minors (anyone under 19), you're also solely responsible for their well-being, actions, and choices, as well as their safety.

Self-Sufficiency

What If does not provide on-site vending or supplies. You're responsible for bringing everything you need, including food, water, camping gear, and any other necessary supplies. Please support the local economy by purchasing your supplies in Merritt, where paw-ssible.



Compliance with Laws and Regulations

You're required to comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies while attending What If. Failure to do so may result in immediate removal from What If, and may subject you to legal consequences.

ABOUT THE SITE

Water

Potable water is available, though it may not be close to your campsite. We strongly recommend that you bring all the water that you'll need for the weekend!

Cell/Data Reception

The site has some cell/data reception, but it can be spotty and will vary based on your carrier. Please don't rely on the site having a phone or data signal; be prepared for no signal and enjoy logging off! 'Ins and outs' (i.e. leaving the site and coming back during the event) will not be granted for any personal reasons, including for the purpose of accessing wifi or cellular reception.

River

The Coldwater River that runs through our site is mostly shallow, but can have fast currents and potential hazards. Never wash dishes or use any kind of soap or other products like sunscreen in the river. Please see Swimming in the River below for more details.

Site Layout

The main site is fairly flat, with rocky gravel roads and pedestrian pathways across the field north of the river and the forest area south of the river. A pedestrian-only bridge connects the two sides, and the river is often low enough in many areas to walk across.

Production Supplied Electrical Power (Power)

Where electrical power is supplied by production, it may be sourced from BC Hydro (utility) or from on-site generators. Production supplied power is subject to conditions at the site. Camps and art projects must be prepared to meet their own electrical needs until Production supplied power is set up. The power grid is subject to a mandatory electrical inspection, once we've completed the power layout.



This is scheduled for Thursday 9-11am. There is intermittent power available beforehand (sound checks for soundcamps can be done, but no permanent power).

In all cases, consumers of electrical power are reminded and cautioned that continuous and clean (surge, brownout, and EMF free) electricity can not be guaranteed. Users are responsible for supplying power conditioning such as surge protectors and uninterruptible power supplies if their equipment can not tolerate power interruptions, surges, or other dirty power situations. Production supplied electrical power must not be relied on for life safety or life support applications.

In Case of Emergency

Should a serious emergency arise, Ranger HQ will be used as a muster station, and the Production Team and the Rangers will direct you. In the event that Ranger HQ is not accessible, please muster at the Forest Gate, unless otherwise directed.

GATE

All participants may enter the event beginning Thursday, July 23, 2026 at 11am. No matter where you will be camping, ALL participants must first check in at the Main Gate on Midday Valley Road. Photo ID is required.

From there, vehicles will be directed based on campsite locations. If you do not know your camping location, Main Gate will assist you.

- **Field (North) Camping (including general camping)**
 - You will be directed into the Flow Hub where parking instructions will be provided, and paper maps will be available
- **Forest (South) Camping**
 - After check in is complete at Main Gate, you will be directed to re-enter the site through the Forest Gate

At Forest gate, every passenger will be checked for a wrist band, they will re-check IDs, and parking will be explained to you.

Regulars Gate Hours

- Thursday, July 23 – 11am-11pm
- Friday, July 24 – 11am-11pm
- Saturday, July 25 – 11am-2:30pm

The gates to the site will be locked from 11 PM to 11 AM Thursday and Friday, and from Saturday 2:30 PM onwards. NO vehicle entries will be possible after the gate closes each day. If you arrive past gate close on Thursday or Friday, you will not be



able to enter until the next morning at 11AM when the gates open. There will be no way to enter the event after the gate closes on Saturday!

Unloading and Parking

Once you arrive at your campsite, you may unload your vehicle for up to 45 minutes. After unloading, vehicles must be moved to the designated parking lot. You may then return to your campsite on foot to finish setting up. Producers will be surveying all vehicles on site and ensure they are following proper protocol.

Exceptions for a vehicle to stay may be granted if:

- You will be sleeping in your vehicle;
- Your vehicle is required for medical or accessibility reasons; or
- Your vehicle is an integral part of a registered theme camp.

Eligible vehicles will receive a temporary vehicle marking at the Main Gate and may remain at the campsite.

Driving on site

To reduce vehicle traffic within the site, please limit driving as much as possible after arrival.

Vehicles are NOT permitted to cross the bridge within the site. Any people or equipment that need to move between the Forest and Field sides must be transported by foot or cart (not provided).

Exodus

Participants may depart the event at any time, but there are **no ins and outs**. When you leave, you leave for good.

- Everyone in Open Camping areas must have their personal camps packed up and cleaned up by 1 pm on Monday, July 27
- Theme camps and large art projects have until noon on Tuesday, July 28 to vacate for the final Leave No Trace (LNT) sweep team

All participants must depart by Tuesday, July 28.

The only people who may remain on site after 12pm on Tuesday are folks who signed up for Department of Public Works (DPW) teardown and LNT crew shifts.

No ins and outs! Have everything you need when you arrive.



DIRECTIONS

Main Gate

- Everyone must check in at the Main Gate with a ticket and matching ID.
- Tickets are never sold at the gates.

Address: 1000 Midday Valley Rd (just beyond this)
Search Google Maps: "[What If main gate](#)"
Map Coordinates: [50°05'18.2"N 120°47'47.5"W](#)

ARRIVAL

Main Gate

Upon arrival at the Main Gate our fur-endly gate volunteers will make sure that everyone has a ticket with matching ID (**name on ID matches the name on the ticket****), put on your snazzy wristband (that must be worn at all times at the event), and perform a quick inspection. Gate volunteers will provide information about What If rules and consent policy, and answer any questions.

If you're bringing a minor, we'll also write down their main parent/guardian's phone number on their wristband.

***Participants that have their dead name on their government-issued ID must email flow@whatif.now ahead of time/by July 17, 2026 to coordinate.*

Forest Gate

Theme camps, artists, and equipment deliveries going to the southern forested side of the site during regular gate hours will check-in first at the Main Gate and go to the Forest Gate afterwards. This process takes extra time, so please arrive at least a half hour before gate closing time so that our Forest Gate volunteers aren't stuck waiting for you in the dark! Participants are never permitted to drive across the bridge within the site.

Early Arrival

Overview

Only select participants will be permitted to enter the site prior to Thur July 23, 2026 and they must pre-register as per below. Early Arrival is for doing set-up, not an early start to the event! Every adult on site early must be contributing to set-up or volunteering. If you need to give someone a ride, get them to sign up for DPW or LNT!



Dates/Times

- Entry on Monday July 20 will **only be permitted** to those that have a volunteer shift on Monday or early Tuesday, and members of the production team.
 - *Gate will be locked at 9pm, so please arrive prior to this time.*
- Entry on Tuesday July 21 will **only be permitted** to those that have a volunteer shift on Tuesday or early Wednesday, members of the production team, and set-up teams from theme camps who have received explicit permission from Production that they can arrive on Tuesday after 12pm.
 - *Gate will be locked at 9pm, so please ensure you will arrive prior to this time.*
- Entry on Wednesday July 22 is permitted for participants helping with a theme camp or art project, members of the production team, and those that have a volunteer shift on Wednesday or prior to 12pm on Thursday.
 - *Early Arrival registration at Flow Hub ends at 9pm and Gate will be locked at 9pm, so please ensure you arrive prior to this time.*

Early Arrival Form: [Click here for Early Arrival Form.](#)

- Each individual adult that will be arriving early must submit their own form. If bringing minors, the ticket purchasing parents/guardian should include all minors on their form.
- Deadline to register for Early Arrival is Friday, July 17 at 11:59pm.
- If you are registering for Early Arrival due to setting up a theme camp or art installation, you must ensure that yourself or your camp lead has gotten written confirmation from Production to arrive early.
- Folks will only be contacted if Flow has any questions or concerns about your request. If you have not been contacted and the form deadline (above) has passed, please assume that your Early Arrival request has been approved.

Gate for Early Arrival

Persons needing to access the Forest side are welcome to go straight to Forest Gate during the Early Arrival period. However those who are arriving during regular gate hours (Thursday-Saturday) must check into the Main Gate first.

IMPORTANT: Wristbands

All participants must have a wristband. Early Arrivals must attend Flow Hub or Forest Gate for your wristbands on Wednesday, July 22, 2026 between 6pm and 9pm. - bring your tickets and ID! Wristbands will not be given out prior to this 3 hour window.



Note: There's no pre-gate time entry for volunteers on Thursday – if you have a Thursday volunteer shift that starts at 11am or earlier, you need to be on site on Wednesday night before 9pm!

Camping Placement

Designated locations for theme camps, art, and production should be kept clear. Open camping is not allowed in these areas. Open camping is located in the field on the north side of the river – there is no open camping in the forest side! Greeters and Parking volunteers will guide you to the designated open camping area.

Accessibility

What If believes deeply in radical inclusion. Our home in Merritt on the Coldwater River is relatively flat. However it is also a dusty field with many loose rocks, and it's quite a long walk end-to-end. We're committed to supporting people to meaningfully participate in our What If community and would love to hear from you about any accessibility needs you may have. Please contact: accessibilty@whatif.now

Shuttle service is available to help those with mobility challenges get around the site by running a regular route that takes about an hour to circumnavigate the site. Shuttle driver volunteers are being scheduled between 10am and midnight, Thursday to Sunday.
Details found at: [Accessibility – What If](#)

PARKING

Parking at the site

All vehicles must park in the parking areas unless you're sleeping in your vehicle, using it for a theme camp, or need access to it for your specific accessibility needs. For eligible vehicles being parked within camps, drivers must get a temporary vehicle marking at Main Gate. Please try to park eligible vehicles further back in your camp, so that the main roads are inter-cat-ive (interactive!), rather than a paw-rking lot!

For all other vehicles, please unpack and move your vehicle to the parking area before setting up camp. If a vehicle is towing something (such as a camper) that is staying within a camp, tow vehicles must unhitch and move to the parking area.

RVs and Large Vehicles

RVs that are part of a theme camp should consider arriving as early as paw-ssible so that they're able to navigate to their camp. Some core service roads will become unavailable once the event begins.



We will be doing a call-out for those willing to designate their vehicles as Emergency Evacuation vehicles. These vehicles will be given a special sticker and asked to keep the keys to the engine on the driver's seat and parked nose-out to the road. In the event of an emergency evacuation, you (or the nearest sober person) will be able to drive your vehicle offsite when others might be directed to abandon their vehicles, in exchange for taking a full load of people off site when directed by emergency services.

WHAT TO BRING

- Ticket
- Legal photo ID (must match ticket)
- Sleeping shelter and camping gear
- Shade structure / parasol / tarp
- Flashlights / headlamps / lights to wear for visibility at night and spare batteries
- Comfortable footwear (several pairs!)
- Warm clothes
- Rain gear
- Food and water
- First aid kit
- Earplugs
- Sunscreen / sun hat
- Dust mask
- Single ply toilet paper
- Hand sanitizer
- Toiletries
- Prescription medications and supplements, including inhalers and epi pens
- Bug repellent and treatment for bites
- Backpack, mug, and a MOOP baggie for your garbage when roaming
- Portable cushion or chair
- Yoga mat for workshops in the dust
- Garbage bags: black and clear (refundable containers)
- Grey water container

Grey Water

Bringing grey water containers and packing out your grey water is a best practice to truly Leave No Trace! Use phosphate free and biodegradable soap to wash up, at least 200 feet away from natural water sources (not in or near the river!). For those camping on the north/field side of the river, you may strain your grey water and dispose of it at the road along the bottom of the cliffs, making sure it is far enough back to not run into any camps.

Food and Water

Again: you must bring all supplies with you! No in-and-outs are permitted to get supplies. Although there is access to potable water on site, **bringing your own water is strongly recommended.**



Eight litres per person, per day for drinking, cooking, and basic hygiene is a rough estimate - bring more if the forecast looks toasty!

There are no showers onsite, so folks bringing their own showers will also need extra water for that, as well as a plan for grey water management to keep it away from the river.

Ice

Bring ice to keep your food fresh, or better yet, plan a menu that meow-nimizes items that need to be kept in a cooler! Please practice self-reliance strategies, such as using ice blocks, dry ice, or bringing food you've frozen at home. Expect hot temperatures!

We'll have **limited** ice provided free of charge on Friday and Saturday at noon by DPW.

Shelter

Bring shelter and protection from the rain, sun, and insects. Prepare for all temperatures. The weather is unpredictable in this mountain valley and the wind can really whip up with little notice. Please be radically self-reliant and prepare for whatever nature throws at you, especially wind!

Skinny aluminium tent pegs are typically not strong enough for the wind at our site and the yellow plastic tent pegs are no match for the rocks in this river valley, especially if you're camped on the field side. We strongly suggest heavy duty tent pegs, 8" framing nails, or even 8"+ lag bolts to secure your structures (remember your drill/impact driver and socket to fit your lag bolts if you go this route!)

Shelters must never be left unsecured - do not put them up unless you're staking them down immediately. We've had multiple instances of shelters blowing into neighbouring camps, and that's not very neighbourly!

Porta-potties

If it doesn't come out of your body, do not put it in the porta-potty!

The ONLY exception is septic-safe, single-ply toilet paper.

- No garbage, tampons, paper towels, or septic-approved wipes of any kind
- No standing/squatting on the seat
- Keep it clean for everyone's health
- Put the seat down when you exit to meow-nimize smell
- No stickers or writing on the walls - we'll get charged for removing these!

There are no garbage cans in the portos. Menstrual products and packaging must be packed out.



Decorate a porto

You're welcome to "adopt" a porto and decorate it, as long as you remove everything by Monday morning at 10am! Please keep decorations G-rated. Please use regular packing tape to stick anything up on the walls and make sure no tape residue remains.

LNT, Garbage, and Recycling

There are no garbage or recycling collection bins onsite. Pack it in, pack it out! Please plan to bring garbage bags, bins, and enough room in your vehicle to leave with your garbage and recycling. Also recommended is your own personal MOOP baggie for your backpack that you bring with you on your adventures and volunteer shifts. And don't furr-get that part of LNT is keeping your campsite tidy, so that cleaning up during Exodus is easier.

Note: refundable recycling drop-off in collaboration with the Merritt Girl Guides district has been coordinated in prior years, but has not been confirmed as of Survival Guide publication. Be ready to take advantage of this by rinsing and separating your refundable recycling into see-through bags, and be prepared to take them home if it doesn't happen!

Clothes

Warm and dry clothes: Merritt has significant temperature changes and occasional sudden rain showers. It can be hot, cold, wet, and dry all in one day! Please bring additional warm and waterproof clothes. Accessories such as hats, scarves, and thermal socks are particularly helpful, as well as comfortable, waterproof footwear to keep your feet warm and dry.

Layering is key: Dressing in layers allows you to adjust your clothing to changing temperatures.

Also, dust can be pervasive and very irritating, especially for those with breathing issues: consider bringing a mask or even a respirator if needed.

WHAT NOT TO BRING

Glass Containers

Even with the best intentions and safest handling, glass will break. No glass containers are permitted.



Pyrotechnics and Weapons

The only thing we want to see explode is your mind! Fireworks, firearms, and weapons are not allowed.

Commerce or Vending

Vending is strictly prohibited, as are transactions of any type. We are not a commercial or consumer event, in alignment with the Decommodification principle. Never advertise or promote any business, band, DJ, charity, etc. at What If - leave your advertising handbills at home!

Illegal Substances

Possession, sale, or consumption of illegal substances is a federal offence. Local law enforcement may be present during What If to enforce these laws. What If will cooperate fully with the landowner, their representatives, and the authorities.

Pets or non-certified emotional care animals

Only certified guide dogs are permitted. Please see the [Service Dogs section](#) further down in the Survival Guide for more details.

Any pet discovered on site will result in the owner having to immediately remove the pet from the site. As there are no in-and-out privileges, this is effectively expulsion from the event.

MOOP (Matter out of Place)

One of the founding principles is that we work together to Leave No Trace (LNT). This means leaving the What If site in the same or better condition than you found it. This also means that you should NOT bring items that are prone to creating MOOP, such as feather boas, glitter paint and makeup, stick-on gems, loosely sewn sequins, etc. We appreciate your costumes, but if it's leaving a trail of MOOP behind you, just don't bring it!

Try on your costumes at home: If you find MOOP from it on your floor, leave it at home! Eliminate packaging waste: When packing for your trip to Merritt, reduce the amount of single-use packaging and remove extra packaging from items at home so that you don't need to pack it out at the site!

Opt for reusable containers, water bottles, and utensils.



HOW TO HAVE A GOOD TIME

Participate!

Your participation is what makes What If magical! Leave that 'spectator' mentality at the gate - everyone around you bought a ticket and is working alongside you to make this event happen together. Get in there, volunteer, play, put your hand up, and join in.

Express Yourself!

YOU are welcome here! Step out of your comfort zone, embrace the experience, and get involved!

Radical Self-Expression is a fundamental part of the Burner experience, aligned with Radical Inclusion! You are encouraged to be yourself or to express yourself as boldly as you desire, while also making sure that everyone feels welcome. So go ahead and let your true self shine!

If you find inspiration through exploring and appreciating cultures and practices different from your own, we encourage you to research and be prepared to discuss your choices. Cultural insensitivity can unintentionally exclude community members, so it's important to listen respectfully and accept feedback gracefully.

Together, let's strive for inclusivity *and* expressive freedom.

Gift your passions!

The beautiful tapestry of citizen contributions is what makes What If special. Participants dedicate their time and efforts to their passions, building and sharing their amazing gifts with others. There is an open call-out for workshops - apply to have yours hosted at Centre Camp!

VOLUNTEER

What If is a purely volunteer organized and created event - thank YOU for being part of it!

On top of the guiding 10 Principles of Burning Man that shape Burner events, the most significant difference between a "typical" festival and Burning Man Regional events like What If is Decommodification and Participation by all attending. At most commercial events, you pay your admission and become a spectator for whatever entertainment the producers have prepared for you. At What If, all activities, stages, theme camps, workshops, art, and performances are independently produced by What If participants and offered free of charge for the benefit of everyone. Consider how you can also participate in the event for everyone else's benefit!





Head on over to the [Volunteering](#) page on the website to learn more about getting involved, and to see what areas are still looking for help. Didn't sign up in advance but now you 'get it' and feel inspired? Visit the Volunteer Hub at What If to sign up for needed help!

Here are some of What If teams that are often still seeking volunteers close to or at the event:

- **Sanctuary**

Be present for those that need kind support and are seeking a quiet respite.

- **Department of Public Works (DPW)**

These dedicated individuals arrive early and stay late, setting up the site, pathways, lighting, structures, and assisting with teardown.

- **LNT**

The Leave No Trace crew acts as ambassadors, promoting responsible LNT practices, and participating in the final MOOP sweep of the site after Exodus.

WHAT WHERE WHEN (WWW) and SITE MAP

Download the DUST app now to read details on all of these camps and art projects. Start *starring* camps, art, and events so you can refer to your faves list on site or print at home before you go.

Read the info on how to access and download the app BEFORE THE EVENT, on the website under [WWW guide](#). Of course, a printed version won't get any last minute updates, which will continue to happen in the app.

A printed copy of the final Event Map will be offered to you upon arrival. Once it's finalized, it will also be available on the website under the Event Guide heading.

SAFETY

Radical Self-Reliance

Discover, exercise and rely on your inner resources. While What If provides foundational resources and oversight to support our community, it's essential that every individual takes responsibility for their own well-being. This includes exercising responsible judgement and taking care of yourself. We encourage everyone to embrace this spirit of self responsibility and actively contribute to the well being of the entire What If community.





Cliffs

The north side of our site is a majestic, very high cliff. Walk along the base of it in the early morning and you may hear, or even get a peak at, the yellow-bellied marmots that burrow into and live in them!

- Do not climb up the cliffs.
- Do not jump off the top of the cliffs.
- Do not land a plane on the top of the cliffs.

Generators

If you bring a generator, you must follow these important rules:

- Place generators on a spillage tray; never allow fuel spillage
- Never run generators late at night or early in the morning (11pm-9am)
- Place your generator far from other campers
- Direct the exhaust away from sleeping areas
- Secure power cables to prevent trip hazards
- Never leave generators running unattended
- Any contaminants on the ground must be cleaned immediately
- Refuelling must take place on a spillage tray

Swimming (and sitting!) in the river

Swimming in and entering the river is at your own risk, and What If assumes no liability for any accidents or injuries that may occur in or near the water.

The river serves as a vital habitat for salmon spawning and egg-laying: please avoid wearing sunscreen, bug spray, perfume, lotions, or any skin or hair products while swimming. What If does not have showers, and the river is not a substitute for a shower! Do not move the river rocks, to minimize any negative impact on the river ecosystem.

Closely monitor minors at all times and supervise them while at the river. Minors 12 and under must be **in view** of their responsible adult at all times at the riverbank and in the river.

Additional swimming information or specific instructions may be provided on-site – please obey any posted signage.

Bubbles

Please do your best to keep bubbles away from the river. Any bubble machines should push the bubbles into the forest or field, away from the direction of the river. Please refill any bubble devices over a spill tray or solid surface like a table, NOT at the river or over bare dirt!



Trees and Shade

While there are some areas with trees, the main camping areas where open camping and many theme camps are located are predominantly open field spaces. Please come prepared with your own shade structures. Do not cut or damage trees under any circumstances - if you're tying off any camp structures to trees, please make sure that your rope is cushioned enough to not damage the tree.

Bugs

Here are some guidelines to help you navigate buzzing critters:

Mosquitoes can be pesky, so it's recommended to use repellents containing DEET for effective protection. Cream-based products are a good choice as they tend to stay on the skin longer, even when sweating; but not good for swimming. **Stay out of the river after applying anything like this to your skin.**

Later season events on that site have also had wasps, so you may consider bringing a trap to hang near your eating area.

In case of bug bites, it's helpful to bring After-Bite or anti-hiss-tamine creams to calm the itching and irritation.

Keep your tent bug-free by keeping it zipped tight at all times.

If you have allergies to insects, please bring and carry needed medications and / or your Epi-Pen. Let your neighbours / fur-ends know so that they can help you in case of emergency.

Most ticks encountered around Merritt are wood ticks that do not carry the bacteria responsible for Lyme disease. While What If takes place outside of peak wood tick season, they can still be around in July. Wood ticks can transmit other serious illnesses, so please check yourself and any kids for ticks during and after the event. Check out [HealthLinkBC](#) for more information.

Fire Safety

The Effigy will not be burned this year. Due to ongoing forest fire risks, only pre-approved fire performances and fire art are permitted at What If. No candles, propane fire pits, or open flames of any kind are allowed under any circumstances. Smoking cigarettes is only permitted in marked smoking areas, shown on the event map.

Only unmodified cooking appliances and outdoor flameless enclosed heaters are permitted. Be extremely careful and monitor these at all times; these should never be left unattended. If costumes, grass, etc. can make contact and instantly catch fire then it's realistically an open flame and is **not** allowed. Camps with significant cooking or battery charging facilities are asked to always keep a fire extinguisher in reach. All camps should keep a bucket full of water in case of grass fires.





Driving

Speed limit is 8 kilometres per hour! There are children - and Burners acting like children - running around, and driving faster raises more dust that everyone chokes on. Always drive sloooooow and safe! If you're passing pedestrians, you're probably driving too fast!

No vehicles can cross the bridge. If you're camped on the Forest side, you must depart through the Forest Gate. If you're camped on the field side, you must depart through the Main Gate. Driving over the bridge may cause irreparable damage and may cause the bridge to collapse.

Rangers

The Rangers are Burners who volunteer to help their fellow Burners. The Rangers act as a source of information, respond to emergencies, help participants find their way, and mediate disputes, amongst many other duties.

You can find Rangers patrolling What If in pairs wearing blue BC Rangers t-shirts and with radios. Check the event map for Ranger HQ.

Medics and Security

Medics and Security are on-site 24 hours a day. Access their help at the medic station or by asking a Ranger or Production member (anyone with a radio). Security guards are stationed next to each gate in addition to the roving security.

****Please note the location of medics and Rangers HQ when the map comes out, and on your first walk around the site.*

Ask Wellness - Harm Reduction

Harm Reduction aims to provide tools, strategies and education to empower people to protect their own health and safety. Harm reduction is guided by kindness, compassion, and respect for all.

Ask Wellness provides on-site education, substance testing and harm reduction supplies. Ask Wellness will be open from 2pm to 11pm on Thursday/Friday/Saturday, and 12 to 2pm on Sunday.

Sanctuary

The Sanctuary is a safe space for everyone that provides a quiet, calm, comfortable area to relax. Volunteers provide peer support guided by harm reduction and trauma informed principles.

Sanctuary is available 24/7 from Thursday July 23rd at 8:00pm until Monday July 27th at 4:00am.

Children and youth

We welcome the wonder, whimsy, and paw-someness that mini-Burners bring to What If!

New for 2026, What If has a Minors Policy in place. This policy was developed based on feedback from 2025 event participants and community members, BC Rangers, the Production team, and the GVIAS Board of Directors. The intention behind the policy is to make sure that minors are kept safe, help Production and Rangers quickly reunite children and parents/guardians when they're separated, and to protect **everyone's** experience (including kids and teens!) by making the expectations clearer than they've been in prior years.

Parents/legal guardians are responsible for the welfare and behaviour of minors under their care. A "responsible adult" supervising minors must be unintoxicated, 19 or older, and either the child's parent / legal guardian or a consenting adult designated by the child's parent / guardian.

Adults must make sure that any minors under their care adhere to the GVIAS [Participant Code of Conduct](#) and any additional site rules outlined in the Survival Guide (such as no climbing on cliffs, no lasers, leave no trace, etc.).

All minors must wear an age range-specific wristband with the phone number of their parent / legal guardian clearly written on it.

The policy uses graduated supervision during day that's based on ages, with a blanket supervision policy at night.

- **During the day**
 - Minors 12 years old and younger must be in eyesight / earshot of their responsible adult. Minors in this age range should not wander freely at What If.
 - Minors aged 13 to 18 can wander freely in groups of two or more (with the exception of areas/camps designated "Adult Only" or "19+"). Minors aged 13 to 18 should be checked on periodically by their responsible adult to make sure that they're engaged in safe and suitable behaviour.
- **During the night (11pm to 6am)**
 - All minors (aged 0 to 18) must be in eyesight / earshot of their responsible adult.
 - At the riverbank/in the river (all times)
 - Minors 12 and under must be in view of their responsible adult.

Enforcement

If a participant's behaviour does not comply with the Participant Code of Conduct or puts the future of any GVIAS event(s) at risk, GVIAS and Production may take any action they deem appropriate to ensure the safety of the event and its participants,



including requiring increased supervision of minors and other measures outlined in the [Participant Code of Conduct](#).

Allowing a child to engage in a harmful or unsafe activity or repeated lack of supervision of minors as outlined in this policy may result in ejection of the parent/legal guardian and minor(s) from the event.

Ultimately: Rangers and Production won't be running around checking on every child who isn't attached to an adult by a leash. The What If Minors Policy makes it clear that responsibility for supervision and safety of minors rests with the parent/legal guardian, in support of the Consent principle that underpins the event.

There are theme camps centered around children, and Production is working on a Survival Guide annex that provides more tips for anyone thinking of bringing their kids! In the meantime, our Alberta neighbours have gathered extensive tips for families on their [Young Burners at Freezer Burn webpage!](#)

There may be adult subject matter that is inappropriate for children at What If. There are also physical risks at the site, from the obvious river and cliffs, to heat stroke, harmful plants, and more.

Be aware that full nudity is permitted and interpreted as non-sexual by default in this community - your little kids will purr-ty much fit right in, but you may want to discuss this with your older kids and teens.

Drones

Drones are **not permitted** at What If without **pre-approval** from What If Production **prior to the start of the event**. Failure to comply with the below Policy will result in drone confiscation, and expulsion may be considered. Refer to the [GVIAS Drone Policy](#).

Service Dogs

No pets or animals other than certified service dogs are welcome at What If. If you plan to attend What If with your certified service dog, please contact: safety@whatif.now in advance to let us know.

Service dogs are to be leashed at all times while at What If and must not interfere with the enjoyment or safety of others. Owners must clean up after their service dogs.

Photos and Videos

Always explicitly ask for permission before taking anyone's photo.

Images, videos and audio recordings taken for any commercial purposes are strictly prohibited; this includes sharing content on commercial social media accounts.



Do not take photos of minors without their parent/guardian's explicit permission. Only parents/guardians can post photos of their minors online after the event.

Photos of nudity are strictly prohibited.

Alcohol and Cannabis

Consumption is only allowed within a designated campsite.

Minors are never allowed to consume or hold alcohol or cannabis.

Alcohol and cannabis are not allowed to be consumed in public places like roads, fields, or rivers outside of your campsite or one into which you have been invited. Please consume your alcoholic beverages at the camp that gifted it to you. GVIAS complies with all local and provincial laws.

To maintain a safe and responsible environment for personal alcohol and cannabis consumption at What If, we require everyone to follow these additional rules:

Storing Alcohol and Cannabis

Alcohol and cannabis must be stored in a concealed, semi-secure area that is not easily accessible.

Do not leave alcoholic beverages or cannabis items unattended.

Do not transport open alcohol between campsites.

Camp Host Responsibilities

Camp hosts must monitor the level of intoxication of their campmates and guests to make sure that overly intoxicated individuals do not consume more alcohol or cannabis. Camp hosts should discourage guests from taking gifted alcohol when they leave camp. Camps should check wristbands when gifting to make sure that minors are not provided with alcohol. Minors will have a distinctive wristband that looks different than adult wristbands.

Mutant Vehicles

Registration and Safety Inspections

All mutant vehicles must be registered and undergo safety inspections before they can operate at What If.

Restricted Speed and Driving Areas

Speed limit is 8 kilometres per hour. Mutant vehicles must follow specific driving areas designated by What If Production. Mutant vehicles must not cross the bridge without explicit permission from What If Production.



Sound

Mutant vehicles that emit sound or play meow-sic must follow What If's sound rules, including limitations on volume levels, noise curfews during certain hours, and specific zones where amplified sound is not permitted.

Lighting and Visibility

Mutant vehicles must have lighting and illumination for clear visibility. Install functional headlights, taillights, and reflectors to ensure visibility during nighttime operations.

Respect for Participants and Art Installations

Exercise respect for the participants, art installations, and theme camps while operating your mutant vehicle. Avoid obstructing art installations or impeding the flow of pedestrian traffic.

Compliance with Local Laws

Mutant vehicle operators must comply with all local laws and regulations, including vehicle registration, driver's licence, and insurance requirements.

Sound

Amplified sound in sound stages requires pre-approval and all those playing amplified sound must adhere to the Sound Policy. Please see the [Sound Policy](#) for those details, but in general please be aware that:

Sound Curfews

- Amplified sound must end by 6am on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, and by 2am on the final Sunday night.
- A lot of thought and effort goes into creating and curating sound through the Sound Policy and theme/sound camp placement process. You are asked to participate in this process rather than 'going rogue'.
- Everyone should bring good earplugs!

Boundaries and Consent

At What If, consent plays a crucial role in order to create a space for radical self-expression. To prevent harassment and assault, we must understand and respect each other's boundaries. Everyone must be responsible to navigate the intersection between self-expression and the boundaries of others through clear communication, especially given the diversity of our community.



Consent applies to ALL of our interactions with each other, not just intimate connections!

When it comes to interactions, enthusiastic and explicit consent is the only acceptable form of consent. Anything less than a resounding 'yes' is NOT consent. The absence of a 'no' does not equal a 'yes'. Consent is given freely, and can be withdrawn at any time. Creating an environment founded on consent acknowledges that a person has autonomy over their own body and respects each person's decisions and that they know what is best for themselves. Coercion or emotional manipulation to obtain consent is strictly prohibited, and persistent violation of consent boundaries may result in expulsion from What If.

Effective communication is key. Consent for one thing does not imply consent for anything else. Be aware of your personal boundaries and feel comfortable expressing them. Always seek and respect the boundaries of others, even if you have prior familiarity with someone. Remember that comfort levels can vary at different times and with different individuals.

Mindfulness regarding substances is crucial and healthy. According to Canadian law, individuals under the influence of substances are unable to give consent. You must be aware of your own state, and the state of others, when engaging in any interactions with people, artwork, and general surroundings.

If you find yourself in a situation involving threatening behaviour, violence, abuse or assault of any kind (e.g. physical, emotional, sexual, cultural, racial) there are protocols and support systems in place. **Seek assistance from any person with a radio** (Ranger or Production member), visit Ranger HQ or go to the Medic Station for immediate help.

Expulsions / Evictions

Expulsions / evictions are final and at the discretion of the Producer On Call, with the endorsement of the Director on Call from the GVIAS Board of Directors.

Offences that may initiate eviction include but are not limited to:

- No wristband or proof of ticket
- Failure to follow the drone, fire, or sound policy
- Photography without permission
- Vending or commerce
- Vandalism or property damage
- Leaving children unattended (Please see Children and youth section of this guide)
- Use of pyrotechnics or fireworks
- Possession of a weapon
- Failure to follow the GVIAS Participant Code of Conduct
- Failure to respect other participants' stated boundaries, including insistent and intentional misgendering



SURVIVING AFTER WHAT IF

The Journey Home

What If is a physically and psychologically taxing environment, and we want everyone to get home without a scratch!

Since only our feline friends have nine lives, here are some tips to help you get home safe:

- Make sure that drivers are well rested, hydrated, and free of intoxicating substances before getting behind the wheel
- Consider one last dip in the river after you pack up your vehicle. It'll leave you feeling refreshed and alert, instead of sweaty, dirty, and tired!
- Fuel up your car and body (caffeine, bannock, lunch, etc.) before leaving Merritt
- Check road conditions before leaving, as balmy sunny skies on site can shift to torrential downpour and windy gusts in the highway canyons!
- Pull over to rest as soon as the driver starts getting drowsy. There are rest stops along the highways, and even pulling over on a wide shoulder is better than going off the road in an accident
- Make sure that your vehicle is roadworthy before you leave the site. Double check trailer connections and lights, keep gear out of the driver's line of sight inside the vehicle, securely strap down everything on roof racks, and pack your gear so that nothing flies forward if you have to slam on the brakes
- For passengers – do your part to keep your driver alert! Practice your DJ skills with the playlist, keep them snacked and watered, and proactively suggest a rest stop if you notice their attention (or the vehicle) drifting.
- Spend an extra night on site (and catch up on your sleep!) by volunteering with our Tuesday Leave No Trace crew.

Practice Self Care

As we've mentioned, What If can be physically and mentally exhausting. Make sure to prioritize self care after the event:

- Deep clean yourself
 - Get someone to check you for tick bites or other injuries
 - Eat nutrient-rich foods and hydrate
 - Take a paws and catch up on sleep
 - Take a break from substances
 - Spend time with family and friends
 - Unpack and do laundry
 - If you can, try to schedule an extra day off work to ease your transition
 - Consider journalling or talking to others who attended What If
- 



Don't Divorce Your Parakeet

There's an old burner saying that you shouldn't "divorce your parakeet" immediately after a burn.

That means that you should wait a couple of weeks to decompress before you make any big life changes like quitting your job, ending a relationship, or getting rid of a pet. If the feeling that you should make a big change persists, double-check your decisions with family, friends, or a therapist.

Ask for Help

If something happened to you at the event or you're having difficult feelings after the event, don't hesitate to reach out for help to family, friends, camp mates or other Burners, or one of the services below (all are staffed 24h/day).

You can also contact any of these services if you're concerned about someone else.

- Crisis Helpline: call 1-800-784-2433 or text 9-8-8
- Mental Health Support: call 310-6789 (no area code needed)
- Alcohol & Drug Use Referral Service: call 1-800-663-1441
- Victim Support: call 1-800-563-0808 or text 604-836-6381
- Find specific services in your community: helpstartshere.gov.bc.ca
- See more resources at whatif.now/event/care/

If you were affected by, witnessed, or would like support with an incident of dangerous or harmful behaviour at What If, the GVIAS Conduct Committee provides a compassionate and confidential assessment of conduct concerns reported by members of our community. Learn more about the Conduct Committee's role at gvias.org/conduct/

GRATITUDE

We extend our deepest gratitude and a heartfelt thank you to the **Nłeʔkepmx and Syilx people**, the original stewards of the land on which What If takes place - their enduring strength and presence reminds us of the importance of respect, reciprocity, and honouring the land.

We would also like to extend our genuine appreciation to each and every one of you who attends this year's What If. Your presence and active participation truly makes What If 2026 a remarkable experience. We are immensely grateful for your enthusiasm, creativity, and commitment to the 10+1 principles that define our burner community.

A special thank you and appreciation for all whose unwavering commitment, passion, and the countless hours of hard work were dedicated to making What If 2026 an extraordinary experience for everyone! Thank you:

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- To the Theme Camps, for creating welcoming environments, fostering connection, and contributing to the collective spirit of our event.
 - To the Artists, whose extraordinary works of art have brought wonder, inspiration, and awe to What If.
 - To the Sound Camps for curating exceptional lineups, amplifying the Burner spirit, and becoming the pulsating heart of What If.
 - Also a deep appreciation to Ask Wellness for their invaluable contribution to keeping us safe.
 - To Board of Directors for your wisdom, support, and commitment to our shared mission.
 - To Committee Members for your invaluable contributions, support and for upholding the core values of our community.
 - To the Production Team, whose work behind-the-scenes is the backbone of our event, and for going above and beyond to ensure a seamless and immersive experience for all. To Team Leads for your dedication, mentorship, and the countless hours you have invested in making our event a resounding success.
 - Last, but not least - thank you to the **Volunteers!** Your enthusiasm and positive energy are invaluable. We thank each and every one of you for donating your time and skills to make What If 2026 extraordinary!

We wish every Burner a safe and wonderful experience. May the memories created and the connections forged during What If 2026 continue to inspire and uplift you in the default world.

Welcome Home!

The What If 2026 Producers