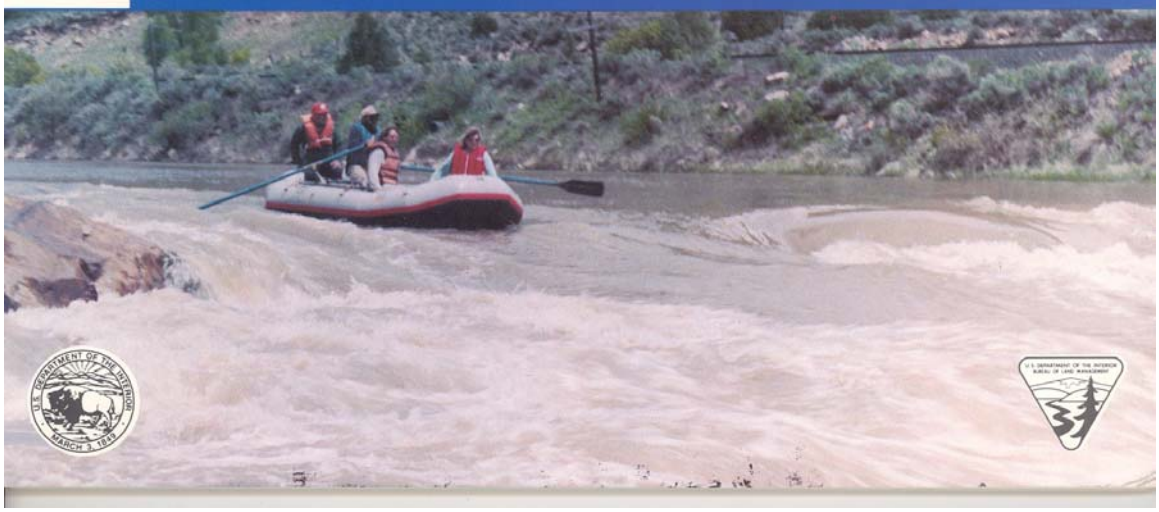
BLM

Colorado

The Upper Colorado River Recreation Area



EMERGENCIES: Where to Call

Numbers below are for emergency calls only; life threatening, personal injury, property damage, or wildfire incidents.

Kremmling, Grand County (river segment from Kremmling to Radium):

Emergency	911
Sheriff	(303) 725-3343

Eagle County (river segment from Rancho del Rio to Dotsero):

Emergency	911
Sheriff	(303) 328-6343

Telephones are available at:

Radium (private home)
Rancho del Rio (at the resort/store)
State Bridge (at the resort/store)
Bond (at the store/restaurant)
Burns (pay phone at the store)
Anderson Camp (at the Camp office)

During the summer, late May through early September, BLM personnel can provide radio contact with headquarters in Glenwood Springs and in Kremmling and can relay emergency assistance requests.

THE UPPER COLORADO RIVER RECREATION AREA KREMMLING TO GLENWOOD CANYON VISITOR GUIDE AND MAP

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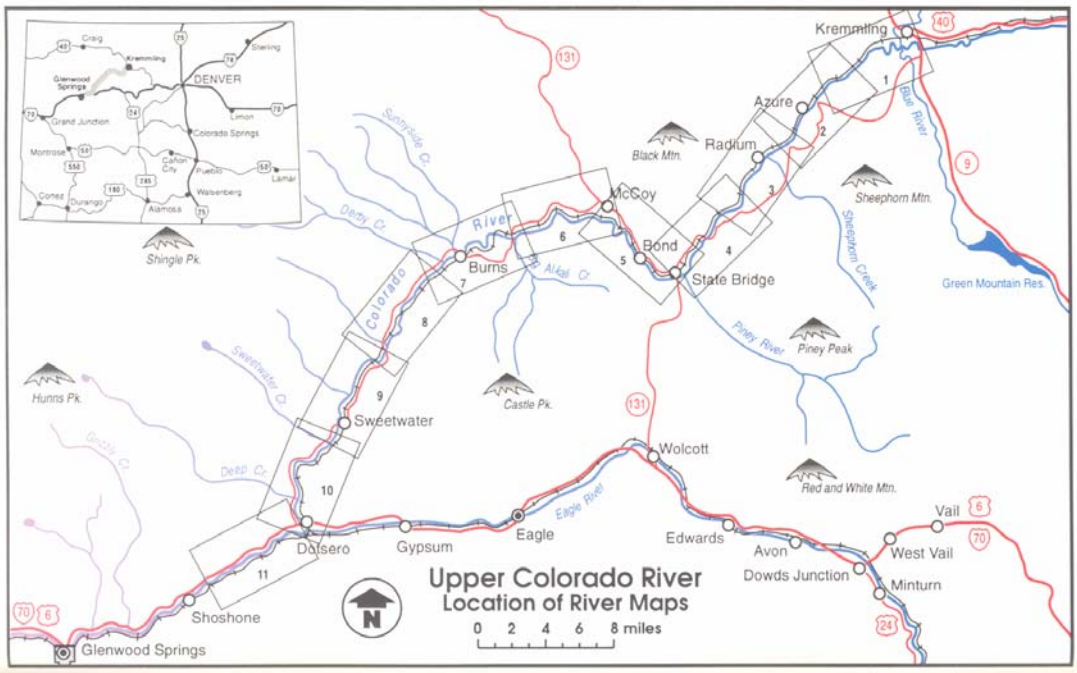


GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Introduction: The Upper Colorado River Recreation Area provides many outdoor recreation opportunities in a variety of scenic settings. Fishing, rafting, kayaking and canoeing, camping, picnicking, sightseeing and wildlife viewing, may be enjoyed on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) along the river. Hiking, mountain bicycling, jeep, motorcycle, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) riding opportunities are also available on roads and trails in the area. Outdoor recreation is one of the important multiple uses of public lands, and the BLM is committed to ensuring the availability of public land for public enjoyment.

This visitor guide provides information about some outstanding natural, cultural, historic features, and recreation facilities along the Colorado River from Kremmling to Glenwood Canyon.

Area Description: The Recreation Area includes 77 miles of the Upper Colorado River from Kremmling to Glenwood Canyon near Glenwood Springs. The river way begins near the headwaters in the Rocky Mountains and elevations range from 6,000' to 8,800' above sea level. The area is within a two-hour drive from Denver, and is near the resort towns of Vail, Keystone, Steamboat Springs, Winter Park, and Glenwood Springs. Settlements along the river include Radium, State Bridge, Bond, McCoy, and Burns, which provide basic services to travellers.

The Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad and county roads parallel the river. The scenery includes ranches, small settlements, and natural canyons with cliffs and steep slopes. Riparian vegetation includes cottonwoods and willows. Scattered spruce and ponderosa pines intersperse surrounding slopes covered by sagebrush, pinyon-juniper, and a variety of mountain brush depending on the elevation. An assortment of wildlife may be seen along the river depending on the time of year. The geology varies, including formations of sandstone, shale, Precambrian rocks, and volcanic intrusions.

Brief History of Area: Recent evidence uncovered by archaeologists suggests human occupation along the Colorado River from 5,000 to 6,000 years ago. The State Bridge and Blue Hill areas contained seasonal and possibly year-round settlements. The Ute Indians occupied the area until the late 1800's when displaced by European settlers. The railroad was extended from the front range through the area in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Before the railroad, stagecoaches provided freight, mail, and passenger service to settlements along the river. You can still see the remains of the stagecoach route and ferry crossing near McCoy and along Highway 131.

The 1906 survey of the "Moffat Road" through the Gore Canyon cliffs required suspended bridges. Some worker huts remain above Gore Canyon. The Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad has used the grade since 1947. The railroad between McCoy and Dotsero was completed in 1934; it was one of the last railroad construction projects in the country. It is still a major east-west freight and Amtrak route.

The westward expansion of the United States claimed all lands as public domain under federal control. Homesteading in the late 1800's and early 1900's led to today's private land ownership pattern. Homesteaders settled in broader valleys with arable land and descendents of original homesteaders still own some of today's ranches along the river. Public lands are found along the river where the valley was too rugged and narrow for farming and homesteading. These lands now provide valuable recreation and natural resources.

Colorado Historical Society Photograph

Outdoor Recreation Opportunities:

River floating by raft, kayak, and canoe is possible throughout the summer and early fall. Most launch and take-out sites have ample parking and toilet facilities. River flow information is posted at river access sites during the floating season, which is generally from late May through mid-September when flows are over 700 cubic feet per second (cfs). Peak flows over 2,000 cfs generally occur from mid-May to mid-June. Water storage and releases from Lake Granby, Williams Fork, and Green Mountain reservoirs influence the flows. River flows generally decline to below 1,000 cfs in mid-August.

Fishing for rainbow, brown, cutthroat, and brook trout is fair to good year round. Camping and picnicking are available at many undeveloped sites. RV parking, tables, firepits and water are available at only a few sites. The river maps show many of the parking areas along the river.

Many roads and trails along the river may be used for hiking, mountain bicycling, jeep, motorcycle, and OHV riding. Several roadless areas along the river provide non-motorized opportunities for seclusion and isolation, including the Bull Gulch Wilderness Study Area.

Wildlife viewing includes deer, elk, and bald eagles in the winter; waterfowl, red tail fox, bighorn sheep, beaver, and a variety of small birds and mammals year-round. Big game and waterfowl hunting is allowed but safety zones are designated in residential areas and developed recreation sites.

TRIP PLANNING

Access: Access to the area is from Colorado Highway 9 south of Kremmling, Highway 131 at State Bridge, and Interstate 70 at Dotsero. Gravel and paved county roads parallel the river and are open year-round.

Availability of Camp/Picnic Sites: Camping and picnicking is on a first-come first-served basis. The river maps identify sites.

Safety Precautions: Roads in the area may be slippery and muddy during winter and rainstorms. Floaters are advised to obtain basic first aid and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training. Familiarity with river hydraulics, location of hazards, whitewater boating and rescue techniques, and treatment of hypothermia is also suggested. The river maps note some navigation hazards, but new hazards may be created by changing river conditions.

Basic Required Equipment: Type III/V personal flotation devices (lifejackets) in good condition should be properly fitted and worn by all persons boating on the water. An additional spare jacket for each 10 people on multiple boat groups should be carried. You should also carry a spare oar/paddle, basic first aid kit, a repair kit and air pump, a bow line, a throw/rescue line, and a bailing bucket. Other basics include food, sunscreen lotion, sunglasses, insect repellent and bite treatment, hat, extra shoes and dry clothes, and waterproof bags or containers.

Flood Hazards: Sudden changes in water levels may occur after rainstorms posing a risk of flooding in low-lying ground. Flash floods and debris flows may occur at the mouths of side drainages. Avoid camping in low-lying areas and below gulches, especially at the Bench Site, Sheephorn Creek, Piney Creek, and Cabin Gulch.

Insects: Ticks are abundant during spring and early summer, and may carry Rocky Mountain spotted tick fever and Lyme disease. Check routinely for ticks. Mosquitoes and biting flies may be encountered throughout the summer.

Hypothermia: Hypothermia is a risk even in the summer because of the altitude. Symptoms to beware of are bluish skin, uncontrolled shivering, weakness, decreasing coherence, and lack of coordination. In advanced stages, reduced mental ability may lead to poor judgment and can result in death. Stay dry as much as possible and wear clothing that retains insulating qualities when wet (wool, polypropylene or neoprene). Rain gear, jackets, sweaters or blankets are recommended. Treat hypothermia at first symptoms by removing wet clothes, warming with dry clothes, warm liquids, heat from a fire or body heat from another person.

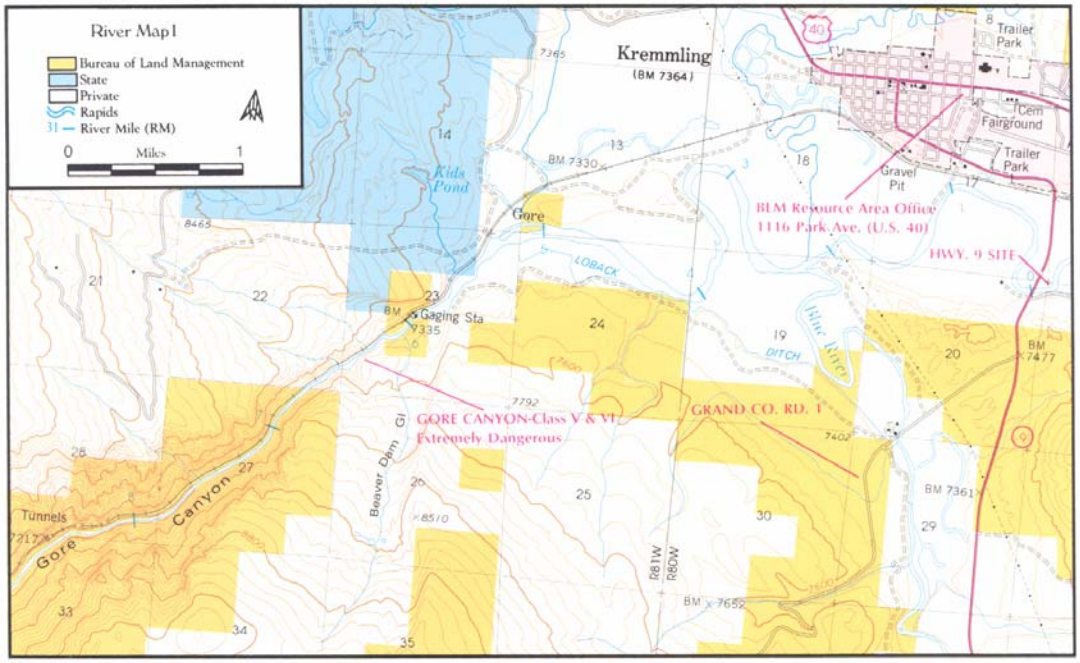
Bridge Crossings: Some road bridges are single lane and narrow. Some railroad and road bridges have steel piers in mid-channel with sharp edges that can rip a raft and cause serious injury. In a broadside collision, persons should move to the side nearest the pier to prevent the raft from flipping over, and possibly pinning someone against the obstacle. Portaging around bridges may be necessary during extremely high flows.

Drinking Water: Drinking water is available at the Pumphouse recreation site and at some private commercial sites. Carry ample supplies of drinking water. River water is not safe to drink unless boiled or chemically treated and may contain Giardia, an organism that can cause severe disorders of the gastro-intestinal tract.

Handicapped Accessibility: Few of the recreation facilities in the Colorado River Recreation Area are readily accessible to persons with handicaps. Most recreation sites have rough dirt and gravel surfaces. Toilet facilities are accessible to wheelchairs only at the Pumphouse and Radium sites. Several commercial river outfitters provide trips for people with physical handicaps. Please contact the BLM for additional information.

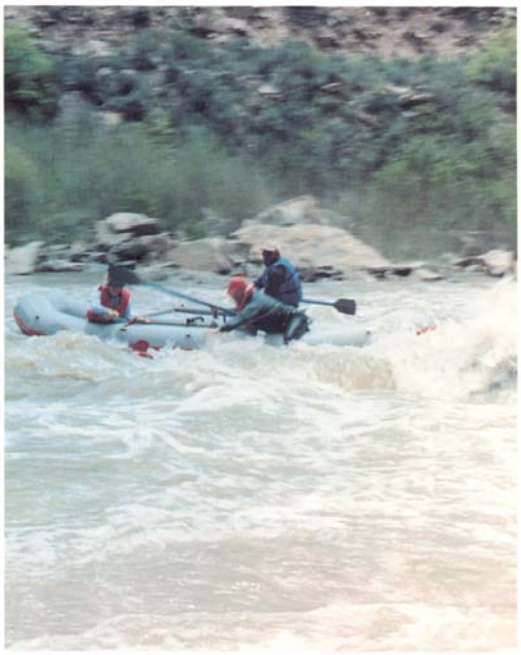
RIVER SEGMENT DESCRIPTIONS AND RIVER MAPS

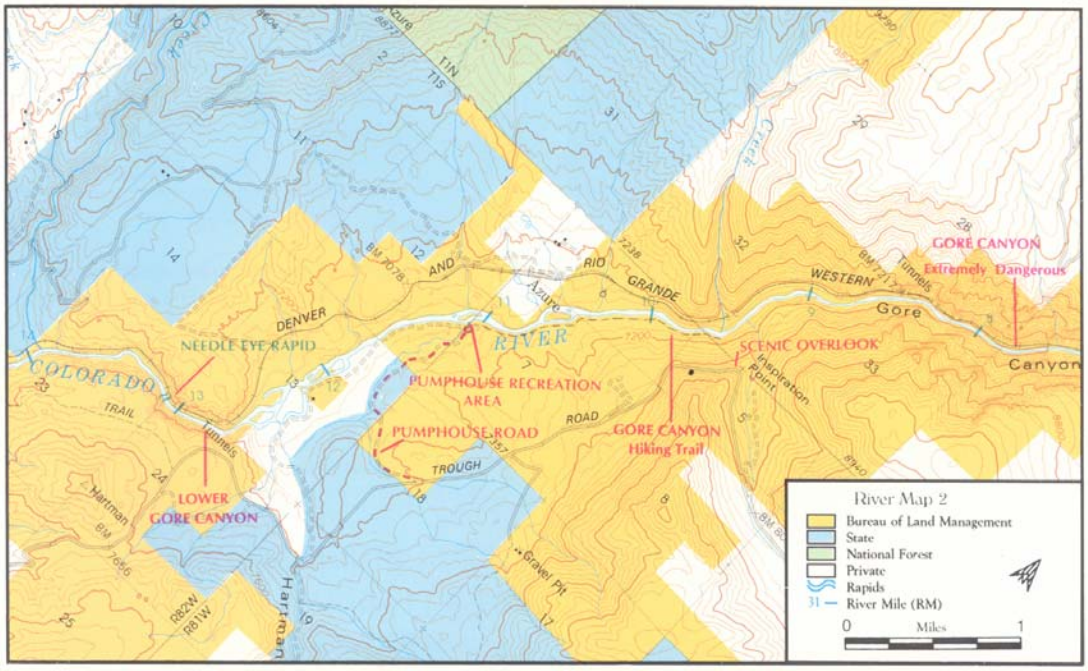
The following maps show the location of public lands administered by the BLM along the upper Colorado River. Each map is keyed to the vicinity map by number. The maps also show the locations of river access and other recreation sites, towns, access roads, and other points of interest along the river. The main features along the river are briefly described in the text. The river mile (RM) notations begin at RM 0.0 at the Highway 9 bridge near Kremmling.



Highway 9 to Pumphouse (Maps 1 and 2) length 11 miles; Floating Not Recommended

A public fishing access site is located along Highway 9 (RM 0.0) south of Kremmling. ***Floating is not recommended through Gore Canyon*** due to dangerous Class V-VI whitewater with boulder fields, waterfalls, strong currents, and steep gradients. The steep canyon sides and cliffs make rescue and portaging nearly impossible. Lands along the river from Highway 9 to the canyon are private, and there is no public access for takeout above the dangerous Gore Canyon.



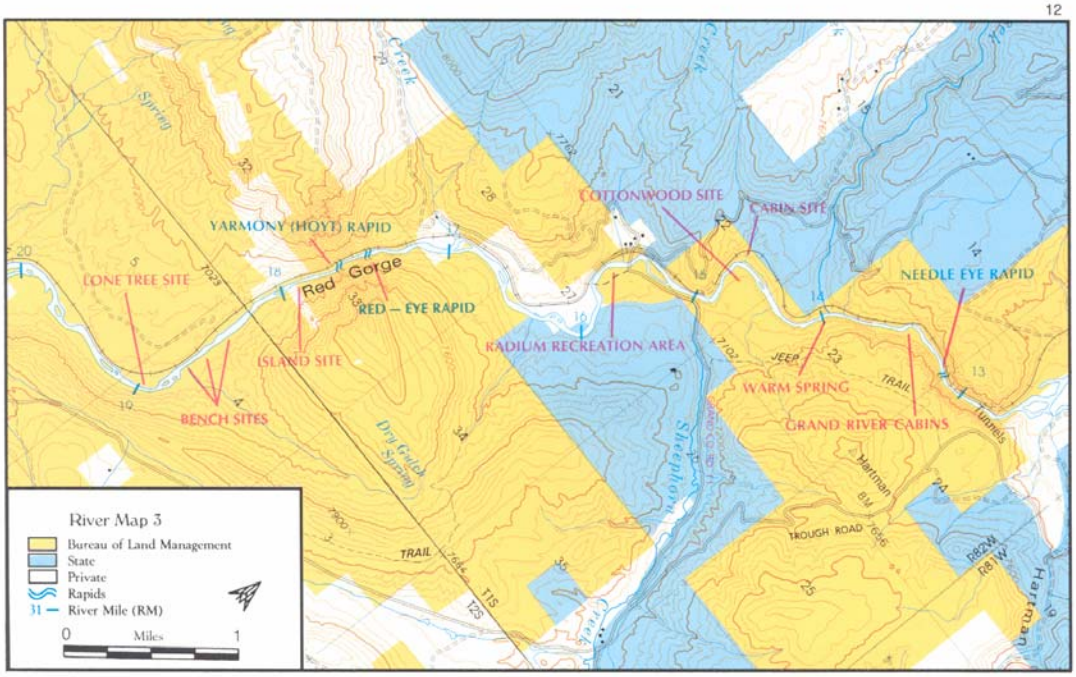


Pumphouse to Radium (Maps 2 and 3) length 4 miles; 2-2.5 hour float

Mainly Class II water; heavily used by private and commercial floaters and sites may be congested at times. The Pumphouse site (RM 11) has two developed launch areas, 12 developed campsites with tables and fireplaces, toilets, and drinking water. A BLM river ranger lives on site during the summer season. The Gore Canyon hiking trail may be used to access primitive campsites.

Precambrian gneiss, schist, and granite rock make up Gore Canyon (RM 7) and Lower Gore Canyon (RM 13). This geologic layer is nearly 1,800 million years old, made of metamorphosed shale, sandstone, and limestone deposits from early Paleozoic seas during mountain building processes. Uplifting of the formations and downcutting by the river created the canyons.

Needle Eye Rapid (RM 13.1) is Class III water with two large holes above 4,000 cfs. The remains of historic cabins are located on the left bank. You can find a small warm spring further below the rapid on the left bank at the foot of the cliffs. *Watch out for the poison ivy on the banks and around the rocks.* The Cabin (RM 14.6) and Cottonwood (RM14.7) sites provide picnic or camp stops for floaters.

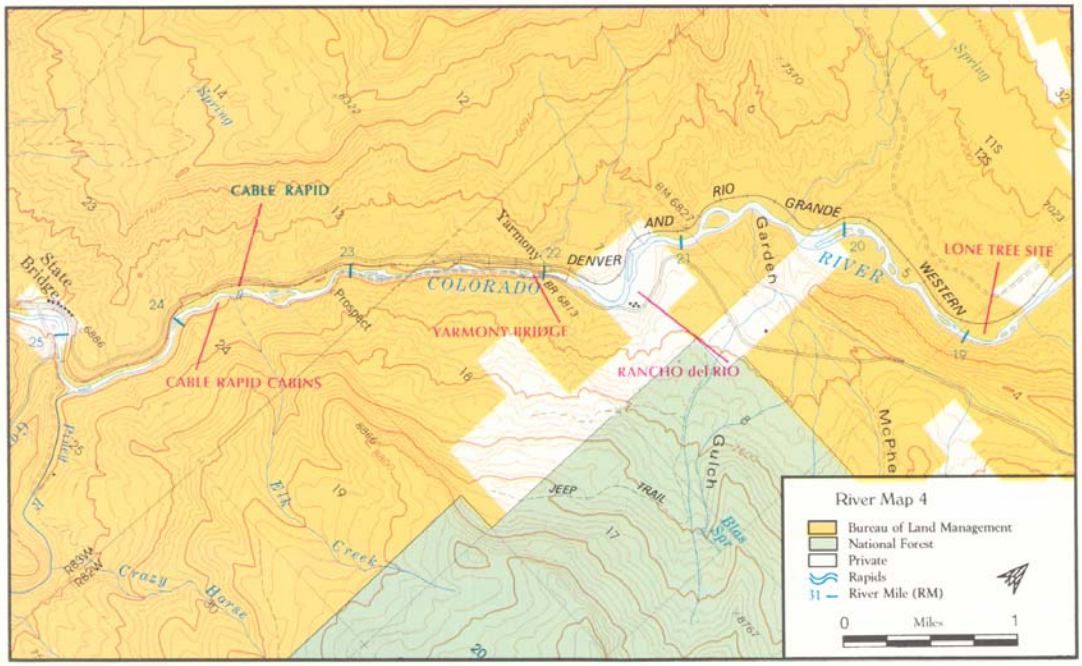


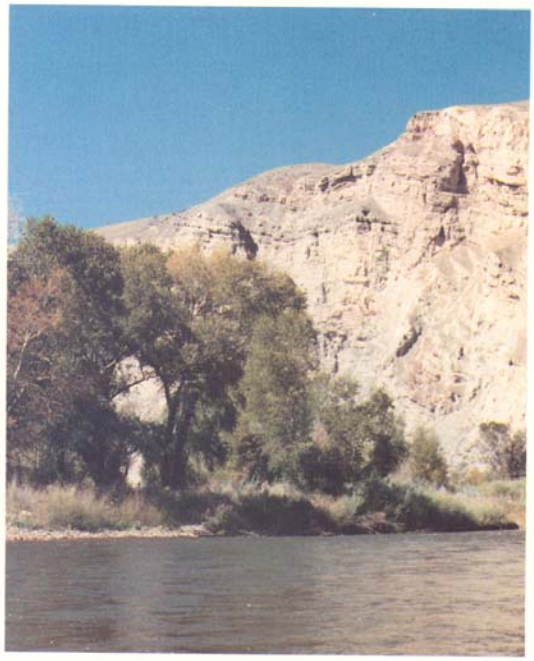
Radium to Rancho Del Rio (Maps 3 and 4) length 6 miles; 3-4 hour float

Mainly slow-going flatwater, especially when afternoon winds blow upstream and require rowing just to keep from floating upstream. A boat launch/takeout, toilets, parking, and a camping area are available at the Radium Site (RM 15.5).

Yarmony (or Hoyt) Rapid located in Red Gorge (RM 17) has a Class II/III drop next to a huge boulder on the right. *At 2,500 cfs and higher flows, the rock is submerged and forms a large hole that can easily flip a raft.* Maneuver to the far left to avoid the hole and lateral waves, and then to the center of the channel to avoid rocks on both banks below the rapid. Scouting is advised from the left bank.

Ponderosa pines shade the Island Site (RM 17.9). A picnic table and toilet are available. Please use low impact picnic and camping techniques at all undeveloped sites including the Bench (RM 18.4) and Lone Tree sites (RM 19.0).



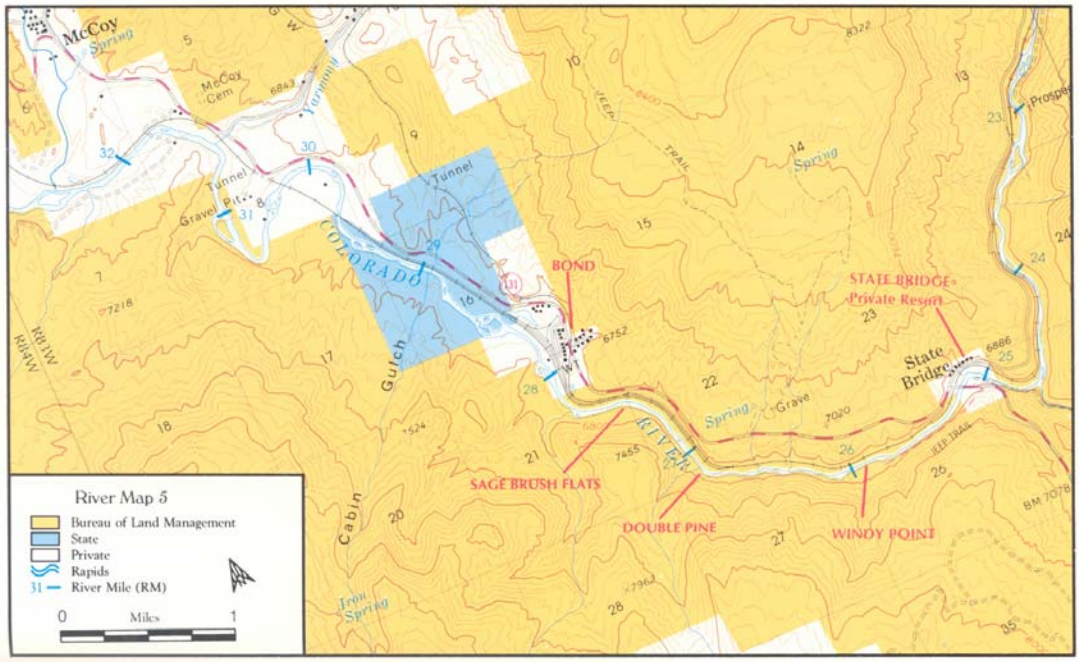


Rancho Del Rio to State Bridge (Map 4) length 3.9 miles; 1-1.5 hour float

Rancho del Rio (RM 21.5) provides a gas station, some groceries, equipment and vehicle storage, toilets and dressing rooms, ample parking, and a large beach-like stretch of river bank. Shuttle services to other river access sites may be provided. Cabins, camping and picnic sites, parking, and launching area are available for a fee.

The Yarmony Bridge Site (RM 22.1) is a small launching/takeout with limited parking and temporary toilets.

Several side canyons including Elk Creek (RM 23.5) and Piney River (RM 24.7) provide opportunities for hiking away from the river. Early settlers built the old cabins below Elk Creek near Cable Rapid (RM 23.7).



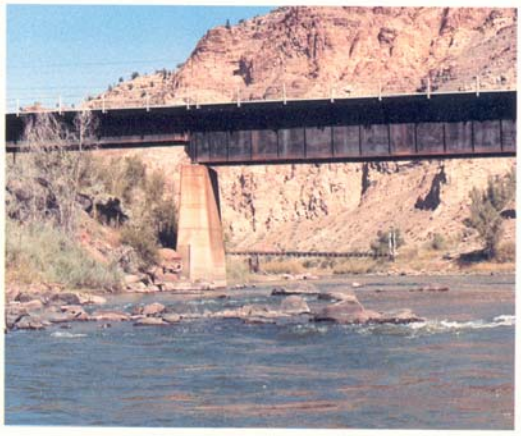
State Bridge to Bond (Map 5) length 2.8 miles; 1-2 hour float

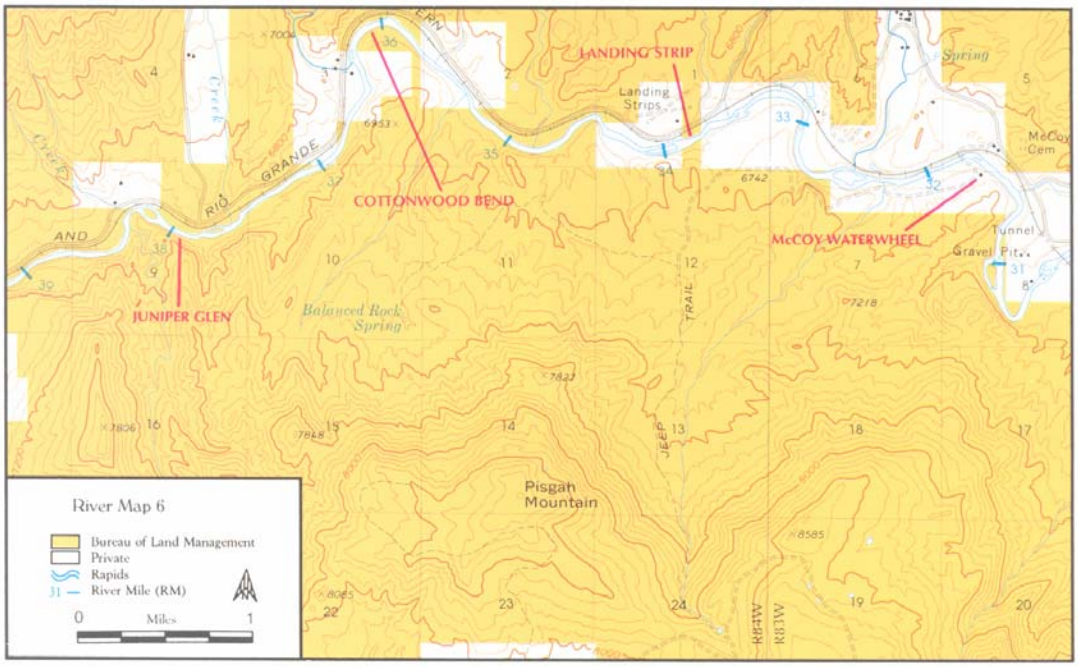
Mainly flatwater with a few Class II stretches in a steep-walled sandstone canyon covered by basalt rocks. The jeep trail on Yarmony Mountain east of Colorado Highway 131 near State Bridge, provides opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, mountain bicycling, jeep riding, and primitive camping.

The State Bridge Lodge (RM 25.2) is a river resort with a restaurant and bar, and special events during the summer. A large parking area, launch/takeout area, toilets, showers, and rental cabins are available for a fee. Remains of the old State Bridge built in 1892 are still standing. It was rebuilt after major floods in 1915 and 1917 and replaced by the modern bridge in 1966.

The Windy Point Site (RM 25.8) has natural boat landings and primitive campsites; a pit toilet is available. Access is by boat or a narrow and rough jeep trail. Old cabins built by settlers decades ago are still standing. The basalt rocks throughout the area are from lava flows in Pliocene times.

The Double Pine Site (RM 26.7) and Sagebrush Flat (RM 27.4) provide floaters with primitive camp or picnic stops with no facilities.





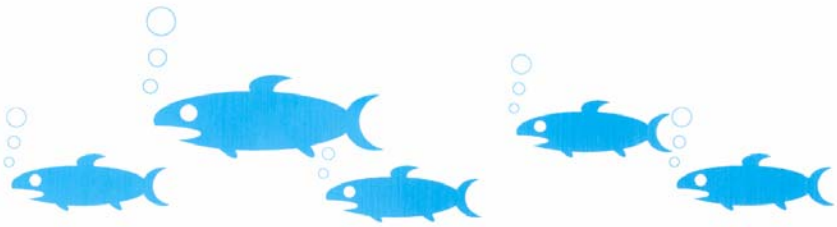
Bond to Catamount (Maps 5, 6, and 7) length 11.3 miles; 3-4 hour float

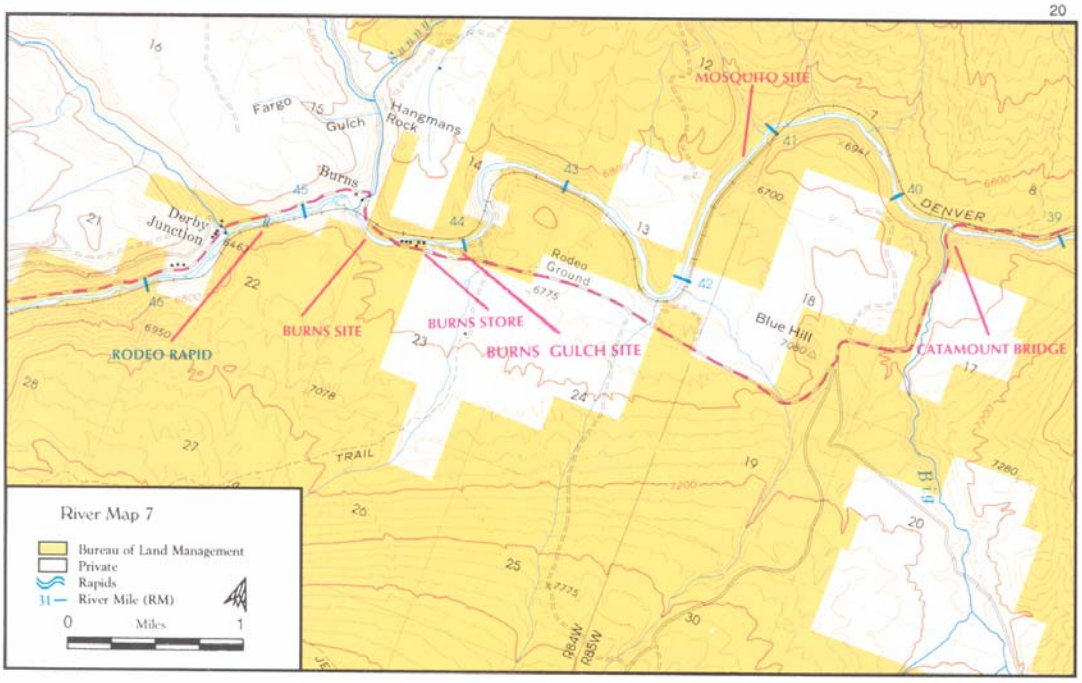
Class II water winding through a variety of sandstone formations; sagebrush, and pinyon-juniper cover become more prominent.

Bond (RM 28) is an old railroad town which today provides a gas station, post office, public telephone, food, and grocery services.

The McCoy Waterwheel (RM 31.7) is the largest waterwheel in Colorado. Eale Brooks built it in 1922 to raise river water to irrigate his homestead on a terrace above the river. The waterwheel is restored and listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Landing Strip (RM 33.8), Cottonwood Bend (RM 36), and Juniper Glen (RM 38) sites provide primitive camp and picnic stops for boaters but have no facilities.
You can see an outstanding anticlinal fold with steep sandstone layers on river left near the Juniper Glen Site.





Catamount to Burns (Map 7) length 4.9 miles; 2 hour float

Class I/II water in a cliff-lined canyon through a variety of sandstone formations. Mancos shale is prominent in the Blue Hill area.

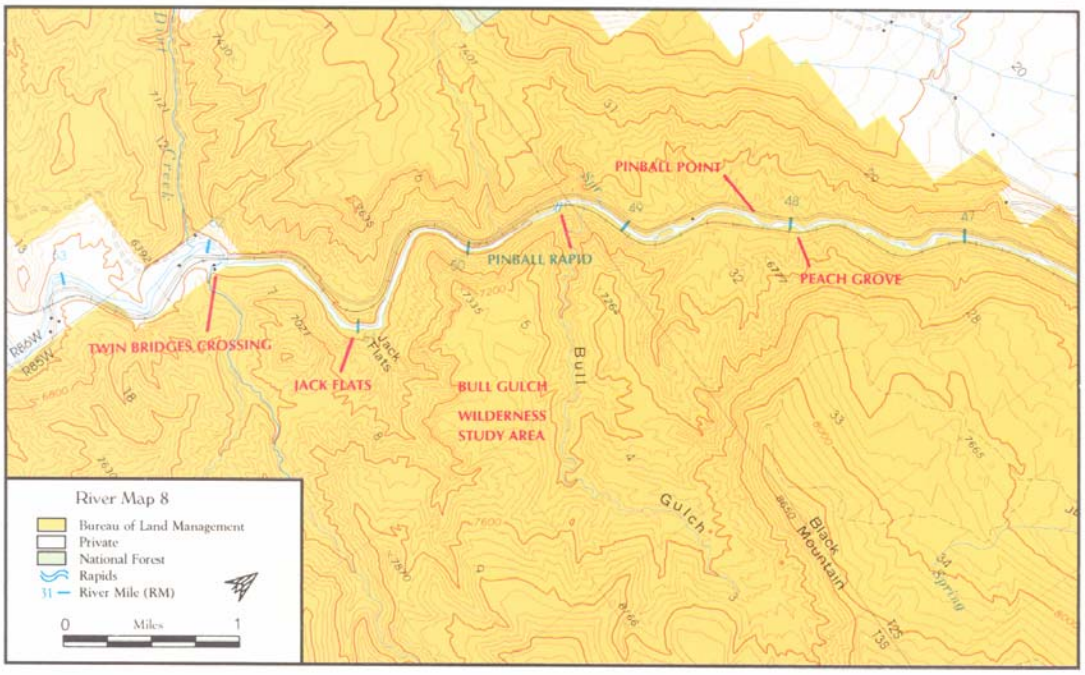
The Catamount Bridge Site (RM 39.6) has a launching area, toilets, parking area, and undeveloped campsites.

The Mosquito Site (RM 41.2) and Burns Gulch Site (RM 44) provide floaters primitive camp and picnic stops. The jeep road from the Burns store crosses private land and is not open to public access.

Burns to Derby Creek (Map 7) length 1.2 miles; 1 hour float

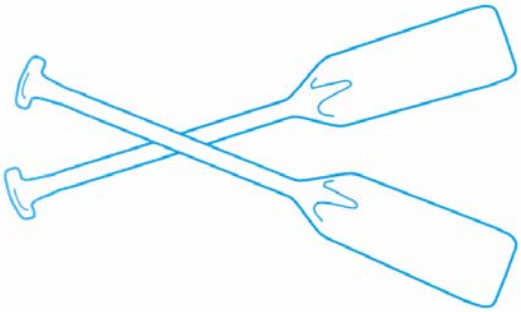
Class II water with a Class III drop over large boulders at Rodeo Rapid (RM 45.2); *scouting is advised.*

Burns Store (RM 44.3) provides a grocery and general store, gas station, rental cabins, Post Office, and pay telephone. A small campsite/river access site on public land is found below Burns Site (RM 44.5).



Derby Creek to Pinball Point (Maps 7 and 8) length 2.6 miles; 1-2 hour float

Class II water through scenic cliff-lined canyon. The Peach Grove Site (RM 48) provides a small primitive camp and picnic stop without facilities.

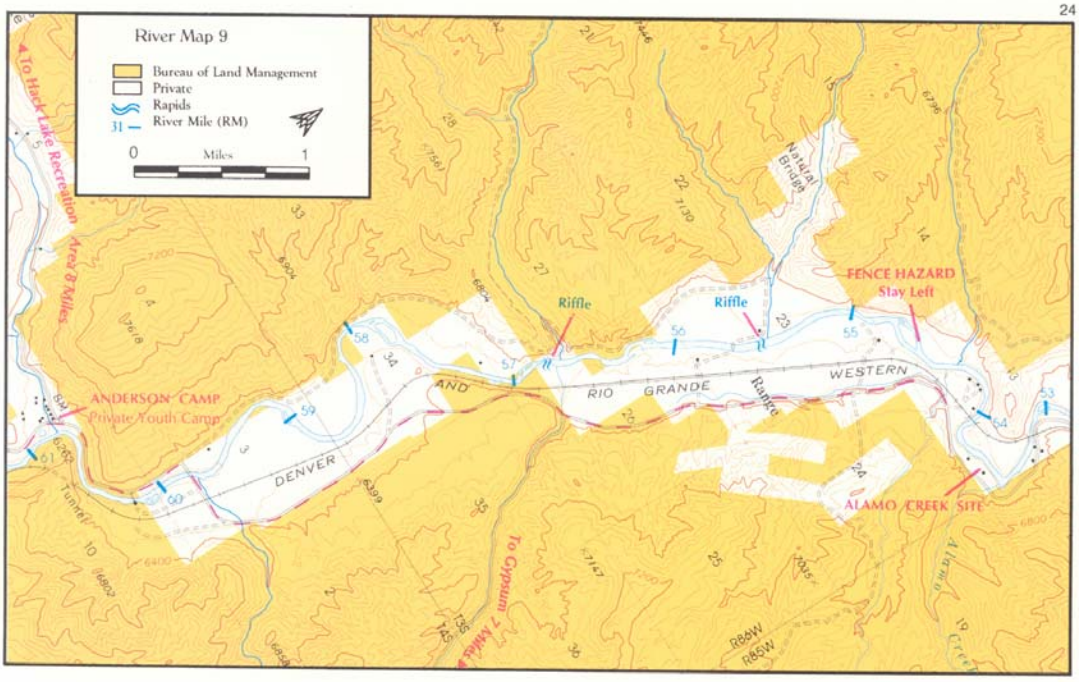


Pinball Point to Alamo Creek (Maps 8 and 9) length 5.6 miles; 2-3 hour float

Class II water through deep gorge in a variety of sandstone formations with several volcanic intrusions. The Bull Gulch Wilderness Study Area borders the river on the left (RM 48 to RM 52).

The Pinball Point Site (RM 48.2) has a launch/takeout area, parking, and temporary toilets. *Watch out for hazardous bridges below Pinball Point Rapid at (RM 49.4) and at Twin Bridges below Jack Flats (RM 51.9).*

The Jack Flats Site (RM 51) is in the Bull Gulch Wilderness Study Area and provides a primitive camp and picnic stop for floaters but has no facilities. The side drainages provide outstanding hiking opportunities.



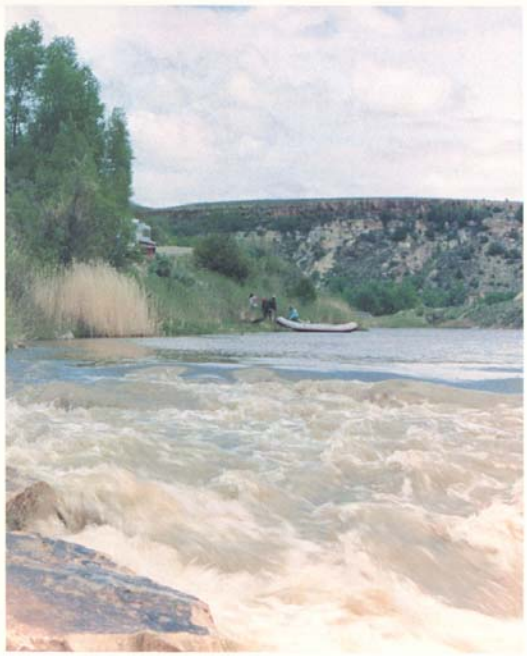
Alamo Creek to Sweetwater Creek (Map 9)
length 7.2 miles; 3-4 hour float

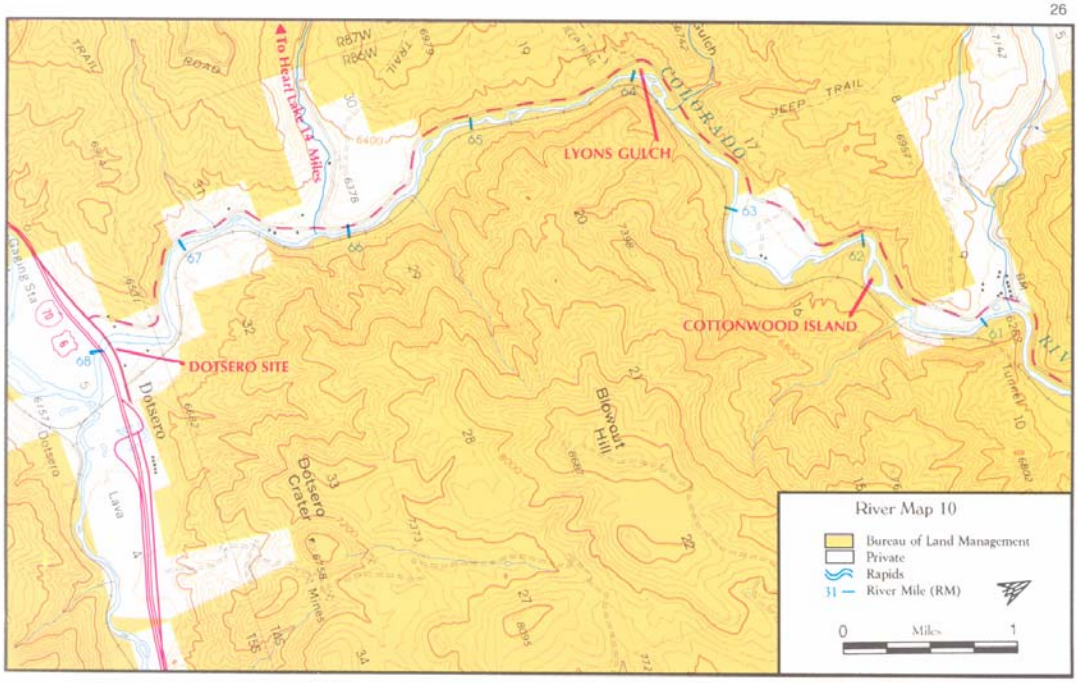
Class II water through broad valley in Eagle Valley Evaporite gypsum formations with intricate features created by folding, uplifting, weathering, and erosion.

The Alamo Creek Site (RM 53.7) is on private land under a temporary right-of-way to allow public access. You will find a boat ramp, parking, and temporary toilets. A bridge crosses the river at RM 53.9.

Look out for a fence hazard on the right channel RM 54.6; stay on river left.

Several stretches of public land in the Horse Creek area (RM 56.2 to RM 56.6; RM 58 to RM 58.3) provide primitive camp and picnic stops, and hiking trails.





Sweetwater Creek to Lyons Gulch (Map 10) length 3.6 miles; 1-2 hour float

Class II water through sandstone formations and gypsum hills. The black layers in the cliffs are thin beds of coal.

The Sweetwater Creek (RM 60.8) confluence is private land with a summer youth camp (Anderson Camp). Adjacent public lands are available upstream for fishing access but parking space is limited. A grocery store and gas station are along Sweetwater Creek Road a few miles upstream from the confluence.

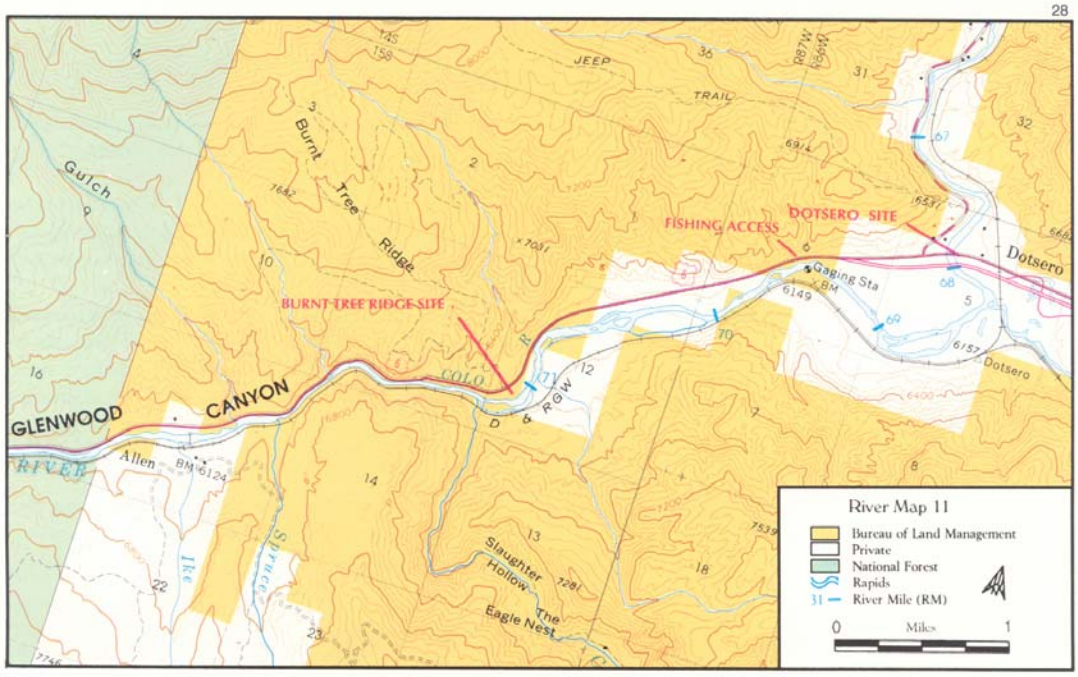
Early settlers built the wooden flume hanging high up on the cliffs to get irrigation water to the Deep Creek confluence area.

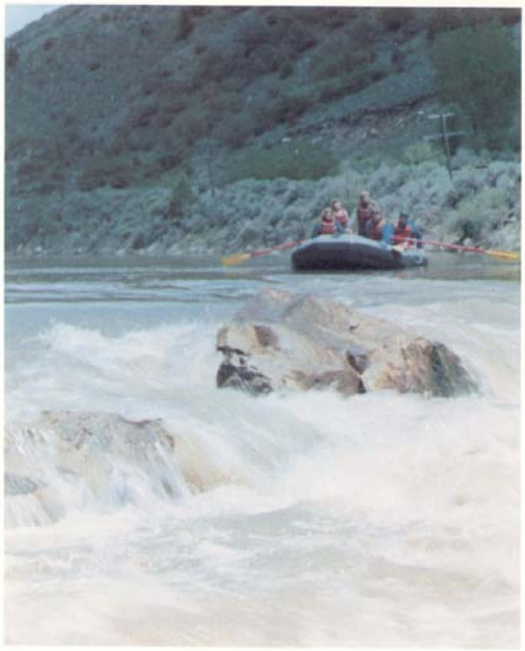
The Cottonwood Island Site (RM 61.8) provides a launch/takeout area and parking, and primitive camping.

Lyons Gulch to Dotsero (Map 10) length 3.8 miles; 1-2 hour float

Class I/II whitewater. The Lyons Gulch Site (RM 64) provides a launch/takeout area, parking, bulletin board, seasonal toilets, and primitive camp/picnic sites. A jeep trail on the west side of the site provides hiking and bicycling access to public lands in pinyon-juniper-covered hills.

The Coffeepot Road parallels Deep Creek (RM 66.2) and provides access to extensive National Forest and public lands.





Dotsero to Burnt Tree Ridge (Map 11) length 3.7 miles; 2-3 hour float

Class I flatwater through broad canyon in gypsum hills past the Eagle River confluence, just upstream from the spectacular Glenwood Canyon.

The Dotsero Site (RM 68) provides parking and a boat launch/takeout area. Temporary toilets are available in the summer at the nearby Glenwood Canyon Project information trailer.

Several islands on public land provide opportunities for primitive picnic stops; no facilities are available. You can find several undeveloped hot springs near RM 71.

River access from Burnt Tree Ridge Site (RM 71.4) is by an underpass across I-70. A paved bicycle path will eventually parallel the river through Glenwood Canyon to Glenwood Springs.

PROTECTING YOUR PUBLIC LANDS

Follow these guidelines to minimize your impact on the land and other visitors.

Fires: Campfires are allowed on public land, but should only be built when absolutely necessary. Use stoves for cooking instead of fires. Fires are prohibited during high fire hazard periods.

If a fire must be built, use a fire pan or an existing fire ring and make small fires only. Avoid building campfires on windy days. Extinguish fires completely after use and never leave burning fires unattended. Burn only dead and down wood, preferably driftwood gathered along the river banks. Do not cut or mutilate live or standing dead trees for firewood. Do not throw unburnable trash such as aluminum cans, bottles, foil or plastic into campfires. Clean up fire rings and pack out debris with other trash.

Human Waste Disposal: Use toilet facilities wherever provided. We recommend you use portable self-contained toilets for primitive sites. A surplus ammo box lined with several heavy duty plastic bags makes a cheap portapotty. Add about a cup of dry bleach or liquid disinfectant to control odors. Urinate in the river, not on the beaches.

If you do not have a portable toilet, dig a hole in at least 6" of organic soil at least 100' away from the river, side drainages, or recreation activity areas. Toilet paper should be packed out with other trash.

Kitchen Detail: Use only biodegradable soap for dish washing. A three bucket method of dishwashing works for sanitizing dishes; one bucket for soaping and scrubbing, another for rinsing, and a third for soaking in liquid bleach solution before drying. The disinfecting bleach bath reduces risk of contracting dysentery and other communicable diseases through food handling.

Dispose of dishwater at least 100' away from the river, side drainages, or recreation activity areas. Pack out food scraps and fish entrails. Food residue and odors attract flies, bugs, and ants.

Trash and Litter: Pack your trash out. Trash collection or pick-up services are not available on public land. Please help keep public lands clean and litter free. Biodegradable bags are available from the BLM. Please ask!

Visitor Registration: Please sign-in at visitor registers wherever furnished, and provide your comments. We evaluate the information and consider your comments in future management of the area.

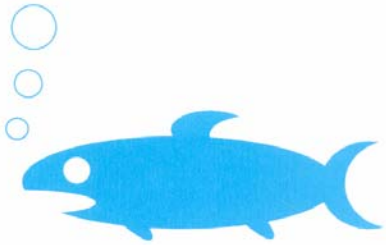
Protection of Public Property: Facilities and signs are provided for your safety and convenience, and require considerable investment of taxpayer's money. Please report vandalism to the BLM.

Historical Site Protection: Archaeological and historical structures and artifacts are protected by federal and state law. Please leave these fragile resources undisturbed so that others also may enjoy them.

VISITOR USE ETHICS

Launch/Takeout Areas: Avoid unnecessarily blocking launch/takeout sites by parking or camping in front of ramps/launch areas; minimize rigging/unrigging time.

Private Lands: Public access is not available on private lands. Please respect private landowner rights. Do not stop, cross, or enter private land for any reason or for any length of time unless you have the owner's permission. Floating across private lands is legal as long as the river bottom or banks are not touched.



Railroad Right-of-Way: Avoid the railroad tracks; do not walk along them. There is constant freight and passenger train traffic on the line. Besides being unsafe, crossing or walking on the railroad right-of-way is illegal trespass.

Water Fights: Keep water fights among the consenting; not everyone appreciates them. Many people do not like getting wet when windy or chilly, or when camera equipment is unprotected. Rowdy, boisterous and loud behavior may be enjoyed by your party, but be considerate of others who come to the area seeking solitude, peace and quiet.

Persons Fishing: Floaters should pass quietly on the opposite side of the river from anglers to avoid disrupting them or snagging a fishing line. Anglers should avoid casting when floaters are approaching.

WHITEWATER CLASSIFICATION

The International Whitewater Scale: The rapids noted on the river maps are classified according to degree of difficulty. Higher flows generally require more decisive and demanding maneuvers. Use extra caution at high flows when fast currents require shorter response times. Scout when in doubt.

CLASS I — Very Easy. Moving water with a few ripples and small waves. Few or no obstructions.

CLASS II — Easy. Easy rapids with waves up to three feet and wide clear channels visible without scouting. Some maneuvering required.

CLASS III — Medium Difficulty. Rapids with high irregular waves capable of swamping an open canoe. Narrow passages often requiring complex maneuvering and scouting from shore.

CLASS IV — Difficult. Long difficult rapids with constricted passages often requiring precise maneuvering in very turbulent waters. Scouting from shore is often necessary, and conditions make rescue difficult. Not runnable in open canoes.

CLASS V — Very Difficult. Extremely difficult, long, and very violent rapids with highly congested routes nearly always requiring scouting from shore. Rescue conditions are difficult. Significant hazards to life in event of a mishap. Ability to Eskimo roll kayaks is essential.

CLASS VI — Extremely Dangerous. Nearly impossible to run and very dangerous. For teams of experts only after close study, having taken all precautions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE UPPER COLORADO RIVER RECREATION AREA, CONTACT:

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