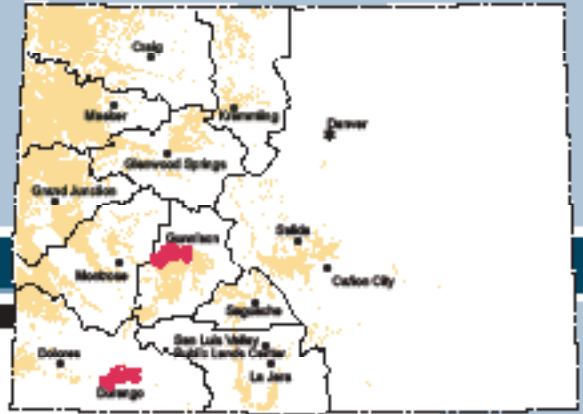


COLORADO

ROAD TRIP



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BLM Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway

By Ann Bond

The BLM Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway receives more than 300,000 visits annually and is one of the nation's top destination areas for rock crawlers and four-wheel-drive enthusiasts. The Alpine Loop crosses the rugged heart of the San Juan Mountains on 65 miles of unpaved roads connecting the towns of Ouray, Lake City, and Silverton. Hiking trails lead to five of Colorado's "fourteeners," and mountain passes demand high-clearance four-wheel drive vehicles to top out at 12,000-plus feet in elevation.

BLM Field Offices in Gunnison and Durango jointly manage the byway, along with thousands of acres of public lands. Places to visit include the Animas Forks Townsite, known for a blizzard that dumped 25 feet of snow in 23 days; Capitol City, which at one time was predicted to be the capitol of Colorado, but today retains only a few structures from its heyday; and Carson Townsite, one of the better preserved mining towns located off the byway.

The first Recreation Area Management Plan for the Alpine Loop was developed in 1986. Today, the Columbine and Gunnison Field Offices are joining forces to update the 20-year-old plan to adequately address winter and summer travel management, and the growing demand for backcountry skiing and snowboarding, ice climbing, dog sledding, and snowmobiling during the winter. The plan will also look at interpretation of historical resources and protection of mining structures.





This October, BLM staffers will be sharing information about the byway and the ongoing Recreation Area Management Plan process at public scoping meetings in Lake City, Ouray and Silverton. The meetings will be the first of several opportunities for the BLM to gather public input on issues and management concerns on the 150,000 acre project area along the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway.

Many projects are also underway to manage the Alpine Loop's extensive heritage resources. In partnership with the nonprofit San Juan Mountains Association Site Stewardship Program, the BLM has been monitoring 10 historical hard-rock mining sites for the past three years. Volunteer site-stewards provide baseline data on conditions over time, as well as information on avalanche impacts, snow loads on structures, recreational impacts, and vandalism.

The Sound Democrat Stamp Mill and the Pacific Mine Boarding House are currently undergoing Historic Structure Assessments with the BLM to analyze their current conditions and provide the necessary recommendations for stabilization, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The BLM is dedicated to preserving these historical treasures on Colorado's public lands.

The San Juan Mountains are noted for the historical use of tramways to move ore efficiently. Archival documentation is underway on two historic mining tramways - the Gold Prince Tram and the Contention Tram. The archival work should provide a more complete, detailed history of these amazing feats of engineering.

In addition, the BLM Columbine Field Office is beginning restorative work on the Tabasco Cabin and the Pacific Boarding House and adding interpretive signs at the San Juan County Historical Society Museum and the Shenandoah-Dives Mill.

For more information on the BLM Alpine Loop, visit the National Scenic Byways Program Web site at: www.byways.org/browse/byways/2105/.

