

Congress designated Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area in 1999 to recognize its outstanding geologic, scenic, wilderness and recreational resources. The Gunnison Gorge Wilderness is famous for its world-class trout fishing, challenging whitewater boating and spectacular geologic formations, which represent a geological history spanning 1.7 billion years.

## **GUNNISON GORGE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA**

2465 South Townsend Avenue  
Montrose, CO 81401  
(970) 240-5300

<https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/colorado/gunnison-gorge-nca>

### **River Flow Information:**

<http://waterdata.usgs.gov/co/nwis/rt>

The NCA benefits from the attention of a group of vibrant, engaged community stewards known as the **Colorado Canyons Association**. Learn more about this group, and find out how you can help at [www.coloradocanyonsassociation.org](http://www.coloradocanyonsassociation.org) or (970) 263-7902.

BLM/CO/GI-18/0016



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

# **Gunnison Gorge**

**National Conservation Area**



# Leave No Trace

- Boaters must carry and use a self-contained, washable, reusable toilet system or an EPA-approved carry out system. Pack out toilet paper and sanitary items. Urinate in the river to reduce smells and fly problems near camps. A BLM toilet dump station is located at the Gunnisons Forks Boat Launch/Take-out.
- Avoid trampling vegetation and do not create new tent sites or trails.
- Use biodegradable soap sparingly and not in springs or side streams. Strain dishwater and pack out food scraps. Dispose of dishwater in the main current of the river.
- Leave natural objects and cultural artifacts where you find them. It is illegal to remove artifacts.
- Be considerate of noise, including speakers, as it impacts wildlife and other visitors.



# Regulations

- Motorized and mechanized uses are prohibited in the wilderness.
- Visitors must purchase wilderness permits at the Chukar Trailhead and sign in at the Chukar Boat Launch.
- Maximum group size is 12 people.
- Maximum number of animals, including dogs and pack stock, is 12.
- Maximum stay length for all parties in the river corridor from Margaritaville downstream to T-Dyke campsite is 3 days (2 nights). One additional night may be spent in a designated river campsite below the Smith Fork confluence (add \$5 per person for third night). No camping is allowed at the Smith Fork.
- Gas stoves, grills, and/or fire pans with charcoal may be used. Coals and ashes must be packed out. You may not cut, collect or use live, dead or down wood for campfires.
- If accessing Black Canyon National Park from the Chukar Trail or camping at Margaritaville camping area, you must register and purchase a Gunnison Gorge Wilderness permit.
- Drones are not allowed in wilderness.

# Camping

## Wilderness Camping

River corridor camping is only allowed in designed hiker or boater campsites identified on BLM maps and signs. Hiker camps are identified in green, boater camps in blue, and camps open to either use in purple. A boating trip leader must register his/her party by signing in at Chukar Boat Launch. For overnight boating parties, only the blue boater campsites can be used, and they must be reserved on the register sheet the day of your party's launch. No early sign-ins are allowed; camps are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Maximum length of stay at each boater campsite is one night.

Gunnison Gorge Wilderness Permit Fees*	
Day-Use	\$3 per person
Camping	\$10 per person for one night \$15 per person for two nights (max. stay)
Annual Day-Use Pass**	\$15 per person/year

\*Each person 16 years of age and older must purchase a pass at the Chukar trailhead. Other passes (America the Beautiful, Golden Eagle, State Parks, Interagency, etc.) are not valid for wilderness permits.

\*\*Valid for one year from date of purchase. Not valid for an entire family or camping fees.



**When in doubt, scout!**  
**At high flows the river can become more hazardous.**

## Boating – Launch and Take-out Sites

Chukar Boat Launch is the only boater put-in used to float the Gunnison Gorge. To get to the boat launch, take Chukar Road, a primitive, rough road that often requires four wheel drive and becomes impassable when wet. Do not take a trailer down this road! The road ends at the wilderness boundary and from there it's a mile-long hike down Chukar Trail to the Chukar Boat Launch. All gear, including boats, must be carried down the trail to the river. No carts or wheeled devices are allowed in the wilderness. J and Ray Outfitters, a commercial horse packing service, is available seasonally.

Gunnison Forks Day-Use Recreation Site offers public launching and take-out on BLM land. There is an adjacent private river access site available for a fee at the Gunnison River Pleasure Park. These are the most common take-outs for boating the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness.

Running the Gorge			
RAPID	CLASS	RIVER MILES	DESCRIPTION
Chukar Rapid	III-	mile 0.0	Single drop at the put-in. Run center left.
One Miler	III	mile 1.0	Run left of the large center hole or rock depending on flows.
Improvise	III	mile 1.4	Recognized by a small vertical cliff on right and prominent rock slide on left. Best run center to right and then improvise.
Upper and Lower Pucker	III-	mile 2.75	Narrow slots at low flows, large holes at high flows (>2000 cfs).
Buttermilk	III	mile 4.0	Large cliff on left. Run center to right, avoid large rock/hole in center.
Ute Park		mile 4.0	The canyon opens up and the river gets shallow. Watch for rocks at low water. Ute Park provides the most campsites in the Gorge and good fishing access.
Red Canyon Rapid	III	mile 5.8	Read and run boulder garden, raft run center-right.
Boulder Garden	III+	mile 7.1	This used to be a Class IV rapid. Flooding in August 2010 altered the hydraulics, making it less difficult. Recommend scouting left. Enter left at top. Run bottom section either far left or right around large boulders in center, recommend right above 1000 cfs.
Paddle Keeper	III	mile 7.3	Best run through left slot.
T-Dyke	III	mile 7.5	Straight run through with nice waves. Last boater only camp is located on right above the rapid.
S-Turn	III	mile 8.5	Large hole on river right, current pushes boats left towards cliff wall.
The Squeeze	III/IV	mile 8.6	Immediately below S-Turn. A deceptive, rocky rapid that has wrapped rafts and pinned kayakers. Recommend scouting, river right. Rafts enter center left and ferry hard right through lower right slot. Avoid rocks center river (<2000 cfs).
The Drops	III	miles 8.8 - 9.1	1st drop is the longest, run down center. 2nd drop, enter right, move left. Center run through slots on final drops.
Cable Rapid	III/IV	mile 9.2	Scout river right catching swift eddy just past vertical cliff. Technical rapid, recognized by large cliff river right, and boulders downstream. Start center, move right. The final drop is usually run with a ferry to river left slot. The right slot is easier to line up, but more consequential.
Jumpin' Jack Splash	III	mile 9.3	Run left of large boulder, finish right avoiding the large hole river left. Watch out for the lateral wave.
Gate Keeper		mile 9.4	Run narrow slots either center at med-high flows, or left against the cliff at flows below 700 cfs.
Grand Finale	III	mile 9.5	Enter first drop on right, followed by short pool. Final drop is best run right, avoid rocks in middle of river.
Smith Fork to North Fork		miles 10 - 14	The Gunnison Forks Day-Use Recreation Site offers boaters a public take-out on the right at mile 13.5 below the confluence with the North Fork of the Gunnison.