Camping

- The area has two group campgrounds and 15 single campsites. The sites cannot be reserved in advance and are filled on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Fees for group and single campsites are posted at the fee area. Please pay campsite fees as soon as you occupy a site. Checkout time for all campgrounds is 1 p.m.
- Dispersed camping is allowed in some areas; please use existing sites.
- Dispersed camping is not allowed in the campground or day-use area; use designated campgrounds only. No camping in parking lots. No camping in the Rock Garden.
- No horses allowed in the campground.
- Dogs must be under owners' control everywhere in Penitente Canyon.
- No firewood cutting or gathering. Dogs must be under owners' control everywhere in Penitente Canyon.
- No firewood cutting or gathering.

Respect Wildlife

Penitente Canyon is home to many animals. When you see wildlife, please:
- Don't follow or approach animals.
- Never feed animals.
- Don't follow or approach animals.
- When you see wildlife, please:
- Control your pets.
- Don't follow or approach animals.
- Avoid sensitive times for wildlife such as early mornings, evenings and breeding seasons.
- Control your pets.
- Don't follow or approach animals.

Mountain Biking

Follow the International Mountain Bicycling Association's Six Rules of the Trail:
- Ride on open trails only
- Leave No Trace
- Control your bicycle
- Always yield the trail
- Never scare animals
- Plan ahead

Trail Etiquette

Cross-country travel on BLM lands is prohibited (except for hiking and horseback).

Other Amenities

Drinking water is available at the well house near the entrance to the area, typically May through October.

Geology

The rock in Penitente Canyon is reminants of up to 18 volcanic eruptions that took place in the San Juan Volcanic Field between 20 and 30 million years ago. The largest of these eruptions spewed 1,500 cubic miles of ash 27.8 million years ago, creating a huge underground chamber. Rocks overlying the chamber collapsed to create the La Garita Caldera.

History

Ancestors of the Ute, Jicarilla Apaches and Puebloans have all left evidence of time spent hunting and camping here, along with explorers and trappers. The valley's first European settlers were Hispanic farmers and sheepherders who migrated from northern New Mexico. Native Americans left scattered pictographs (painted rock art) throughout these canyonlands (the largest of these eruptions spewed 1,500 cubic miles of ash 27.8 million years ago, creating a huge underground chamber. Rocks overlying the chamber collapsed to create the La Garita Caldera.

For More Information

BLM San Luis Valley Field Office
1373 Highway 160 E.
Monte Vista, CO 81144
719-327-7078

Directions

From U.S. 70, turn west on Conejos County Road G. After 0.5 miles, you will pass the La Garita Trading Post. In another 3 miles, take a right on County Road 38A. The entrance to the recreation area is another 0.5 miles on your right.