



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area & Dominguez Canyon Wilderness



Map & Guide

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Bureau of Land Management Grand Junction Field Office

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Grand Junction, CO 81506

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Camping Reservations:

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877-444-6777

www.blm.gov/colorado

Colorado Canyons Association

Colorado Canyons Association is committed to community stewardship of Gunnison Gorge, McInnis Canyons and Dominguez-Escalante NCAs. It is a non-partisan, non-profit, 501(c)(3), volunteer organization fostering cooperation among all NCA user groups. For more information on how to get involved, visit www.coloradocanyonsassociation.org.



LEAVE NO TRACE
GOLD
STANDARD SITE

Dominguez-Escalante NCA is recognized as a Gold Standard site through Leave No Trace that are exemplary models that preserve and protect our natural landscapes for generations to come.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages more than 8.3 million acres of public lands and more than 27 million acres of mineral estate in Colorado. BLM lands in Colorado range from alpine tundra, colorful canyons and mesas, to rolling sage covered hills. The BLM has activities and programs for all public land users to enjoy. Visit www.blm.gov to learn more about your public lands.

Accessibility

The BLM is dedicated to ensuring that everyone has an equitable opportunity to access their public lands by providing access to facilities, programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. To learn more visit www.blm.gov/accessible-recreation.

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Cover Photo by BLM/Bob Wick



BLM Photo by Bob Wick

Dominguez-Escalante NCA & Dominguez Canyon Wilderness

National Conservation Areas (NCA) and wilderness areas are part of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) National Conservation Lands, a unique network of special places that serve as scenic showcases in conservation, protection and restoration of public lands. These treasured landscapes make up more than 27 million of the 245 million total acres of public lands managed by the BLM, mainly in the western United States.



BLM Photo by Bob Wick

Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA) is a special place nestled within the remarkable canyon country of the Uncompahgre Plateau. Red-rock canyons and bluffs hold geological and paleontological resources spanning 600 million years, as well as many cultural and historic sites from the past 10,000 years. The Escalante, Cottonwood, and Little and Big Dominguez creeks tumble through canyons that empty into the Gunnison River, which flows nearly 30 miles through this beautiful desert landscape. Along with impressive scenery, the area is home to a variety of wildlife, including mule deer, golden eagle, turkey, elk, mountain lion, black bear and the collared lizard.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages this area to conserve, protect, enhance and restore these special features for the enjoyment of present and future generations. In designating Dominguez-Escalante as an National Conservation Area (NCA), Congress identified the importance of the scientific, geologic, cultural, educational, archaeological, paleontological and historical values found here, as well as natural, wilderness, wildlife, riparian, scenic and recreational resources. Many of these features

are dependent on the desert stream systems that flow through the NCA. Science and education are also closely tied to the past and future uses of the NCA—these resources have much to teach us about the history and prehistory of the area. Like other NCAs, Dominguez-Escalante is part of the BLM's National Conservation Lands, a series of spectacular western landscapes that exemplify the conservation element of the BLM's multiple use mission.

Dominguez Canyon Wilderness lies in the heart of Dominguez-Escalante NCA, providing habitat for desert bighorn sheep, threatened species of fish and cactus, and opportunities to view its natural wonders by foot or horseback. Water runs through Little Dominguez Creek year-round creating a great habitat for many birds, mammals and reptiles. Rock art on the canyon walls and archaeological sites on the mesas are evidence of thousands of years of Native American use, including hunting and travel from the Gunnison River Valley to the Uncompahgre Plateau. The wilderness also contains historic features left by the early miners and settlers who lived and worked throughout the area.



BLM Photo by Bob Wick



BLM Photo by Jeremy Matlock

About Wilderness Areas

Wilderness is a legal designation outlined in the Wilderness Act of 1964. This designation offers long-term protection and conservation of landscapes, natural values, habitat and sources of clean water on public lands while also focusing on unique features of particular wilderness areas. These special places have little to no human-made improvements and are managed to maintain their primitive character. The National Wilderness Preservation System is made up of individual Wilderness areas that share a common management vision toward preserving naturalness, limiting the influence of man and providing outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

In 2009, Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area and Dominguez Wilderness was designated by congress and approved the Resource Management Plan in 2017.

Dominguez-Escalante NCA and Dominguez Canyon Wilderness offer many opportunities for adventure.

The NCA has few existing facilities, trails can be faint at times and access may be challenging at certain times of the year.



Dominguez Canyon Wilderness

Activities: *Backpacking, hiking, horseback riding, camping and wildlife viewing.*

Dominguez Canyon Wilderness offers scenic canyons and mesas carved in sandstone, cascading streams, waterfalls, spectacular geologic features, desert bighorn sheep, Native American rock art and historic structures from early mining settlements.

The Big Dominguez Trail accesses some of the most popular areas of the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness, including waterfalls and rock art. The most common access is from the Bridgeport Trailhead or from the Gunnison River at the mouth of Big Dominguez Canyon. The upper end of Big Dominguez Canyon can be accessed on a primitive trail from a small trailhead near the Big Dominguez Campground. There is no maintained trail from this trailhead through the canyon to the Gunnison River. Adventurous travelers can make a large loop using Big and Little Dominguez Canyons. This trip can take several days to a week, depending on how much exploring you plan to do.

CAUTION: Crossing between Little Dominguez Creek and Big Dominguez Creek requires advanced route-finding skills, as there is no defined trail. This route is not recommended for novice hikers. Visitors can also reach the Wilderness on the south end, via Escalante Canyon.

Escalante Canyon

Activities: *Day-use picnicking, camping, hiking, wilderness access, driving All-Terrain Vehicles and motorcycles on existing roads and trails, historic touring and exploring.*

This deep red-rock canyon contains sensitive plant species, natural seeps and several globally-unique plants including beautiful hanging gardens of small-flowered columbine and Eastwood's monkeyflower, protected in the Escalante Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

A 15-mile county road offers visitors a trip back to pioneer days through Escalante Canyon's "Red Hole in Time" (popularized by local author Muriel Marshall). The road provides easy vehicle and viewing access to historic cabins and trails, rock walls with early settler and Native American inscriptions, and spectacular geologic formations. The Old Spanish National Historic Trail also passes near the NCA.

The Potholes Recreation Site, located 12 miles up Escalante Canyon, offers picnic tables and shade shelters with several designated overnight camping sites nearby.

CAUTION: Hidden currents found in the potholes formations can catch and keep you underwater, regardless of river flows or your swimming skills. Jumping and diving in the potholes is prohibited.

Cactus Park

Activities: Mountain biking and off-highway-vehicle riding on existing roads and trails, hiking and horseback riding.

Although it may be small in size, this area protects an important gravel deposit. The physical characteristics of the gravel provide geologic evidence that the ancestral Gunnison River once flowed through the Cactus Park and the Unaweep Canyon area. Some areas of Cactus Park also provide habitat for desert bighorn sheep.

Cactus Park includes miles of existing routes, trails and roads for motorized recreation, horseback riding, mountain biking and hiking. The Tabeguache Trail is a regionally popular attraction for mountain bikers and motorized recreationists. While the trail takes one through many of the beautiful areas of the NCA, it requires appropriate gear, planning, and skill to navigate safely. See the Tabeguache Trail brochure for more information.

Gunnison River (Escalante Creek to Redlands Dam)

Activities: Boating, camping and hiking.

Beautiful scenery, hidden rock art and solitude bring visitors to this 800-foot-deep canyon. Expect Class I and II water. The 39-mile trip takes 11 to 16 hours and offers ample opportunities for hiking, wildlife viewing and exploring. Dominguez Canyon is a popular stop along the way, with primitive camping, a hike up Big Dominguez Canyon, hidden rock art and a breathtaking waterfall. Please check the current streamflow data (available online at www.usgs.gov) and weather before your boat trip.

River Access Points:

- **Redlands Dam**
Take-Out*
- **Whitewater**
Put-In / Take-Out*
- **Escalante**
Put-In
- **Bridgeport**
Put-In / Take-Out

* outside the NCA Boundary



BLM Photo by Bob Wick

Be Prepared

Dominguez-Escalante NCA is a rugged and remote landscape. It can be unforgiving of any carelessness. To prepare for your visit to the NCA, always:

- Carry a map, compass, extra water, food and first-aid kit.
- Wear seasonally-appropriate clothing and consider the potential for extreme temperature variation (day and night).
- Tell someone where you're going and when you expect to return.
- Carry a gallon of water per person, per day.
- Use sunscreen and a hat.
- Wear sturdy footwear and watch where you step.
- Be aware of fire danger and be careful with any type of flame.
- Be alert for flash floods in canyon bottoms.
- Water is not always available to treat for drinking; untreated water may not be safe to drink.
- Carry insect repellent to fend off the biting gnats between May and August.
- Avoid entering the seasonal pools that may exist in the canyon bottoms between April and July; sunscreens and lotions can pollute these ephemeral waters.
- Be aware that the soil type in the NCA is mostly clay and can quickly become impassable in wet weather — even for four-wheel-drive vehicles.



BLM Photo by Jeremy Matlock

Legend

- Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA)
- Dominguez Canyon Wilderness

Land Ownership

- Bureau of Land Management
- State Wildlife Area
- National Forest
- National Park or Monument
- Private Land
- Area Limited to Day Use Only

- Campground
- Picnic Area
- Restroom
- Foot Bridge
- Parking Area
- Trailhead
- Boat Launch

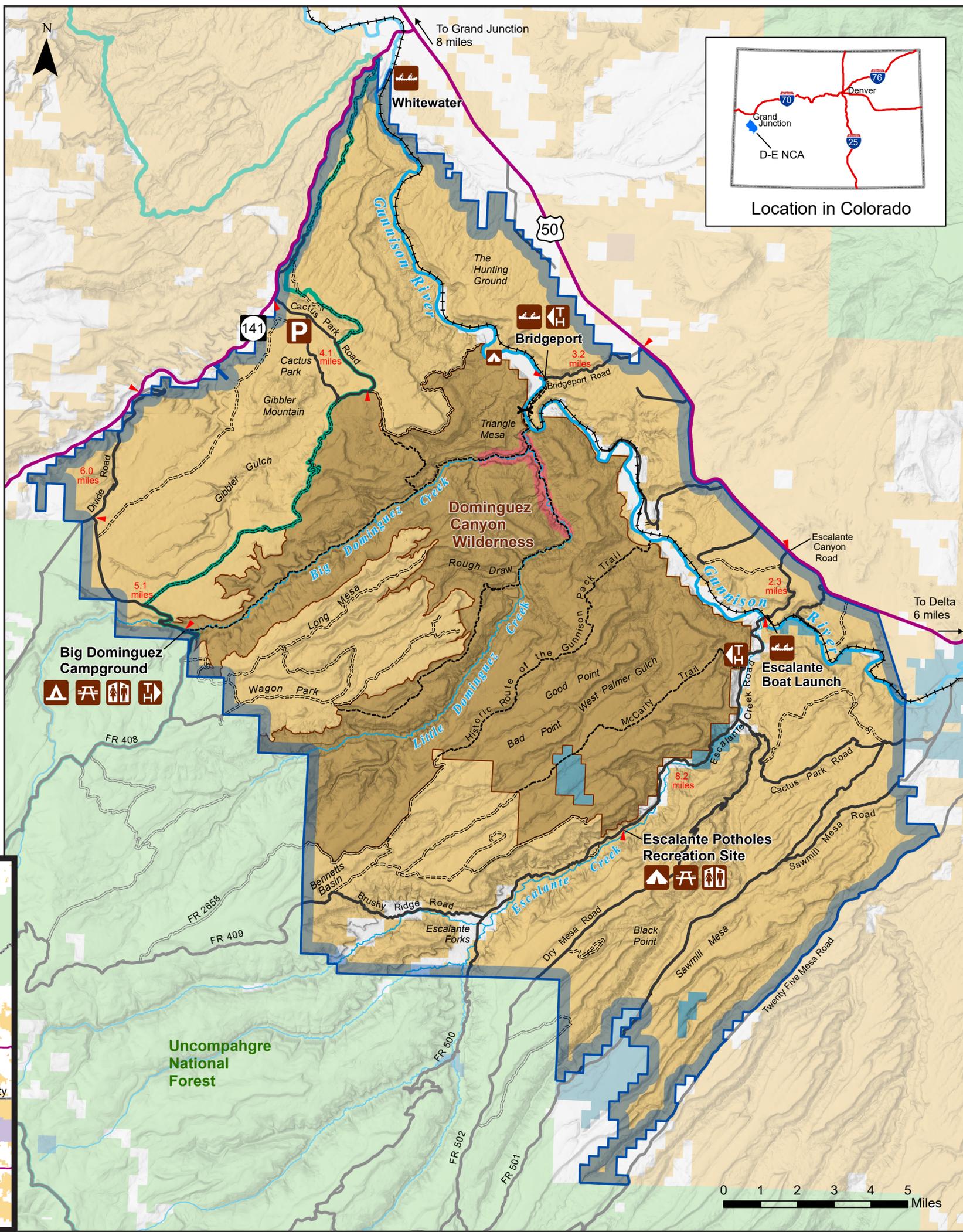
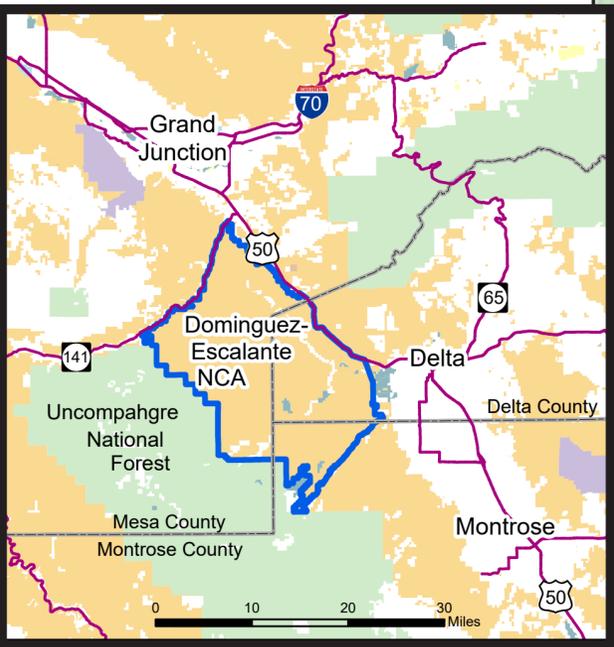
- State or US Highways
- Maintained Road
- Primitive Road
- Trail
- Tabeguache Trail
- Railroad

Note: This map does not show individual route designations or seasonal restrictions. Motorized and mechanized travel is legal on designated routes only. Travel management maps showing route designations and season closures are available through the Dominguez-Escalante NCA website: www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/colorado/dominguez-escalante-nca

Restrictions

- No bicycles or motorized vehicles within Dominguez Canyon Wilderness
- Fire pans and washable, reusable toilet systems or landfill approved bag systems required for river campsites.
- The mouth of Big and Little Dominguez Canyons are managed as Day-Use Only areas (see map).
- River sites are limited for boaters only from Memorial - Labor Day.

LEAVE NO TRACE Please respect all restrictions & practice Leave No Trace ethics.



Leave What You Find

Dominguez-Escalante NCA has a rich cultural history that archaeologists continue to study. Paleontologists continue to uncover scientifically significant dinosaur fossils in the NCA.

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 prohibits removing, disturbing or defacing archaeological sites or artifacts on federal public lands without a permit. Violations can result in a \$20,000 fine and imprisonment for up to two years. The Paleontological Resources Protection Act of 2009 extends similar penalties to protect vertebrate paleontological resources.



- ### Help Protect Your NCA
- Pack out all trash and dog waste.
 - Tread Lightly and Leave No Trace.
 - Stay on designated roads and trails.
 - Check kiosk and website information for any seasonal/temporary restrictions and closures; review regulations posted at specific sites.
 - Drive and ride carefully and courteously. There are several blind corners on the NCA's roads; ranching operations use the roads as well. Please drive slowly.
 - Use designated and existing campsites and park in designated parking areas; do not disturb additional areas.
 - When camping in the Wilderness, campsites should be at least 200 feet (75 paces) from water to protect fragile, ephemeral desert water sources.
 - Use camp stoves for cooking. If a warming fire is needed, use a firepan and pack out ashes.
 - On the river and in day-use areas in Dominguez Canyon Wilderness, use a portable toilet or landfill approved bag system to pack out human waste.
 - In other areas, dispose of human waste by digging a shallow "cat hole" at least 200 feet from water and trails. Do not burn your toilet paper (this may cause a wildfire). Pack out toilet paper.

