Visitor Guide

National Park Service
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior

2007-2008

Black Canyon of the Gunnison
Curecanti
Gunnison Gorge

Sapinero Basin and the West Elk Arm of Blue Mesa Reservoir, Curecanti National Recreation Area

The Power of Water

Whether we need it for drinking, growing crops, boating, or simply for something at which to marvel, water is ever present in our lives. Here at Black Canyon, Curecanti, and Gunnison Gorge, it is the power that unites and creates.

These three areas, although united by the river, have very different stories. They are managed by two separate agencies- Curecanti and Black Canyon by the National Park Service and Gunnison Gorge by the Bureau of Land Management. Both agencies are charged with the protection of the water of the Gunnison River in one way or another.

The Gunnison River begins its journey where the East and Taylor Rivers meet in Almont, Colorado. It then meanders through the Gunnison Valley watering farms and ranches.

West of the town of Gunnison the river broadens out into the deep reservoirs of Curecanti National Recreation Area. In the form of Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal Reservoirs, the water from the Gunnison River provides salmon and other fish habitat, countless recreational opportunities, water storage, and hydroelectric power.

Below Crystal Dam, the waters are diverted again. About 1,850 acre feet of water per day is channeled through the Gunnison Tunnel to irrigate the Uncompaghre Valley.

The river then makes its steep descent, dropping an average of 93 feet per mile through Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, creating swirling rapids and treacherous beauty. The carving power of the river has created the 2,000-foot deep chasm over 2 million years, providing not only dizzying views for visitors, but striking wilderness and wildlife habitat.

As the river heads west on its way to join the Colorado in Grand Junction, it slices through Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area. Here the river widens, providing demanding whitewater for boaters and vistas for hikers and backpackers. Here too, it provides a remote habitat for wildlife and invites visitors to experience rugged wilderness.

In all three of these areas, the water affects visitors and wildlife in different ways. What remains constant, however, is the water itself- always flowing through the canyon. Whether we think about it once a day or once a year, not only here, but in all parts of the world, water affects our lives. As you travel through these three areas and along the Gunnison River, you will experience first hand the power of water.

The depths of the Black Canyon are often best experienced from the canyon rims.

Adventures await visitors who brave the rapids of Gunnison Gorge NCA.

Welcome

Units of the National Park Service and of the Bureau of Land Management belong to the American people, and by extension, to the world. Protecting lands of unique character, scientific, scenic, historic and recreational value has been described as "America's Best Idea".

We invite you to check out your public lands and see how we are doing in keeping them for this and future generations. Rangers at the visitor centers and in the backcountry will help you plan safe and unforgettable experiences.

If you are traveling with children, make an extra effort on their behalf. For many of us, it has been our interactions not only with the natural beauty of the landscape, but with rangers at programs and in the backcountry that have encouraged our love of the outdoors.

We are all stewards of these lands. We hope you discover something you never knew before. It could be something about yourself or a meaningful connection to nature or history. We hope you take a life-long spark of interest home with you when you leave these three areas managed in cooperation by the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

Connie Rudd
Superintendent,
Black Canyon and
Curecanti

Karen Tucker
Area Manager,
Gunnison
Gorge

We're on the Web

Visit the parks all year from the comfort of your home computer.

Black Canyon:
http://www.nps.gov/blca

Curecanti:
http://www.nps.gov/cure

Gunnison Gorge:
http://www.co.blm.gov/ggnca

Playing it Safe

Safety is often not on everyone's mind while visiting parks, but it is a very important part of any trip. Remember to check with rangers for current information on conditions and potential safety hazards in all three areas. Check weather conditions before starting any activity. Weather changes quickly. Be aware of hiking and boating safety and regulations, and also be cautious around all wildlife, water, and steep cliffs. Keep young ones close. Be bear aware. Properly store all food and items that have stored or contacted food. Because of the high altitude and dry air, remember to drink plenty of water. Please enjoy a safe visit to these amazing lands.

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Planning Your Visit

National Park Service
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park
Curecanti National Recreation Area

Together, Black Canyon and Curecanti offer nearly 75,000 acres of canyons, knife-edged cliffs, water sports, and beauty.

Mailing Address
Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP
Curecanti NRA
102 Elk Creek
Gunnison CO 81230

Phone and E-mail
(970) 641-2337
cure_info@nps.gov

Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area

Gunnison Gorge NCA provides 63,000 acres of beautiful landscapes. High clearance vehicles recommended. There are few services, so be self-sufficient.

Mailing Address
Gunnison Gorge NCA
2465 South Townsend Avenue
Montrose CO 81401

Phone and E-mail
(970) 240-5300
co_info@blm.gov

ENTRANCE FEES AND PASSES

Black Canyon entrance fees are $15.00 per vehicle. For pedestrians, bicyclists, motorcycles, and motor scooters the fee is $7.00 per person. A Black Canyon Annual Pass is available for $30.00 and is valid for 12 months from the date of purchase.

Curecanti does not charge an entrance fee except at East Portal. Fees at East Portal are the same as for Black Canyon. See Gunnison Gorge camping section for fees at the Conservation Area.

For visitors interested in visiting multiple public lands, the America the Beautiful- The National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass Program (Interagency Pass Program) is available. Interagency Annual, Senior, and Access passes are available. See websites for more information.

VISITOR CENTERS

The **South Rim Visitor Center,** located at Gunnison Point in Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, is open every day except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Summer hours are 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Winter hours are 8:30 a.m to 4:00 p.m.

The **Elk Creek Visitor Center**, at Curecanti National Recreation Area, is open every day from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend, 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. Winter hours are Monday-Friday 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m. The **Cimarron Visitor Center** is open Memorial Day through Labor Day, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The **Lake Fork Visitor Center** is open intermittently in summer.

CAMPING

Black Canyon

The South Rim Campground is open all year. There are no water hookups or dump stations. Loop B has electrical hookups (only open in the summer). Sites can be reserved through the National Recreation Reservation Service (NRRS). Call (877) 444-6777 or go to www.recreation.gov. Loops A and C are $12.00 per night. Loop B is $18.00 per night. Interagency Senior and Access Pass discounts apply to all camping fees.

The East Portal Campground has 15 sites, none of which can be reserved. Sites are $12.00 per night.

The North Rim Campground has 13 sites and fills on a first-come basis. North Rim sites are $12.00. There are no hookups on the North Rim.

Curecanti

There are several campgrounds with boat-in, drive-in and hike-in sites. Group camping is available at Red Creek and East Elk Creek. Electric hookups are in Loop D at the Elk Creek Campground. The camping fee is $12.00 per site per night. Loop D is $18.00 per night. Reservations can be made for Elk Creek and Stevens Creek sites, and for the East Elk Creek and Red Creek group sites through NRRS. See above for details about the process. Interagency Senior and Access Pass discounts apply .

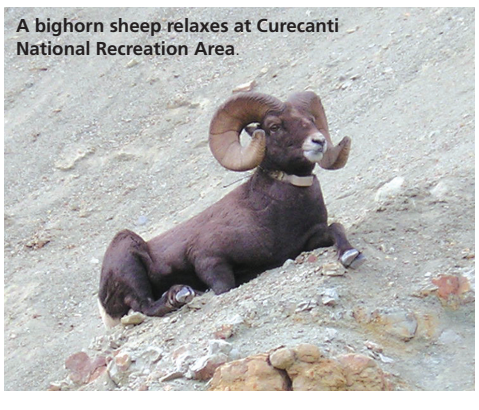
Gunnison Gorge

Vehicle camping is permitted outside the wilderness area on a first-come, first-served basis. Picnic tables and fire grates are available at the Chukar, Duncan, and Ute trailheads and at the Gunnison Forks Day Use Area. Campsites, showers, and services are available at the Gunnison River Pleasure Park. Camping in the wilderness area is first-come, first-served in designated sites. Sites are marked with posts with blue (boater) or green (hiker) tops. Wilderness fees (payable at trail-heads): Day use is $3.00 per person. Camping is $10.00 per person for 1 night, $15.00 per person for 2 nights (maximum allowable wilderness stay). The camping fee applies to all users ages 16 and older within the Gunnison Gorge river corridor.

WHAT ABOUT PETS?

At Black Canyon pets on a six-foot leash may be walked on roads, in campgrounds, to the overlooks, and are allowed on the Rim Rock and Chasm View trails. Pets are not allowed on any other trails, inner canyon routes or in the Wilderness. Clean up after your pet. Do not leave your pet unattended in a vehicle or campsite. Boarding services are available in the area.

Pets are allowed at Curecanti, but must be leashed at all times. Pets at Gunnison Gorge NCA must be under their owners control at all times.



A bighorn sheep relaxes at Curecanti National Recreation Area.

Kids at a Jr. Ranger program at Black Canyon.

Hey Kids - Be a Junior Ranger

Help take care of your national treasures! Anyone ages 6 and up and can become a Junior Park Ranger at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park or Curecanti National Recreation Area. There are challenging activities in the Junior Ranger books that you can do while visiting either park. Learn more about the stuff that makes these places so amazing and unique. If you are under the age of 5, you can become a Curecanti or Black Canyon Ranger Buddy. Stop by the Elk Creek, Cimarron, or South Rim Visitor Centers for more information.

A tour boat takes passengers on a close up tour of the upper Black Canyon.

Boat Tours Into the Black Canyon of the Gunnison

Join a Park Ranger for a leisurely boat tour on Morrow Point Reservoir, traveling seven miles into the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, where canyon walls will tower above you. Hear the stories of the geologic history, wildlife, rugged early inhabitants, the narrow gauge railroad, and the dams and reservoirs.

Logistics

The National Park Service operated tour boat is a stable 40-foot, 42-passenger pontoon boat. Tours are offered twice daily at 10:00 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., Memorial Day Weekend through Labor Day. Ask about occasional special tours. Currently tours are not offered on Tuesdays, but that is subject to change. Check with a ranger. Tours begin at the Pine Creek Boat Dock, located 35 miles east of Montrose, 25 miles west of Gunnison, at US Highway 50 mile marker 130. From the Pine Creek parking lot, you will walk down 232 steps, then enjoy an easy ½ mile walk along the old narrow gauge rail bed to the boat dock. We suggest starting down one hour before your scheduled tour, allowing more time if you need a slower pace. Meet the Park Ranger at the boat dock at least 15 minutes before your scheduled departure.

What to Bring

Dress for the Colorado mountains, where a sunny day can quickly become stormy. Bring drinking water, snacks, sun protection, rain protection, and your camera. For security reasons, carry-on bags and packs are subject to search. Pets, smoking, and alcoholic beverages are not allowed on the tour.

Prepaid Reservations are Required

Prepaid reservations are required, and are occasionally still available early on the day of the tour. Call 970-641-2337, ext 205, or visit the Elk Creek Visitor Center in the Curecanti National Recreation Area. Persons arriving at the boat dock without a prepaid reservation will not be permitted on the tour. Cost is:

- $15.00 for adults
- $7.50 for adults who possess a Senior or Access Pass
- $7.50 for infants and children under age 13

Boating Information

CURECANTI NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

These requirements apply to Blue Mesa, Morrow Point and Crystal Reservoirs:

- USCG approved personal flotation devices are required for all on board.
- One Type IV throwable flotation device for boats 16 feet and greater.
- Sound-producing device.
- Lights for dusk to dawn operation.
- An NPS boat permit is required for motorized vessels on Blue Mesa.
- Motorized vessels must be registered in their home state.
- A fire extinguisher (unless boat is of open construction and less than 26 feet long).

GUNNISON GORGE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

The lower section of the Gunnison River is classified as Class III-IV. The following regulations apply to river running in the Gunnison Gorge:

- Boaters must pay fees at the Chukar Trailhead and register at the Chukar boat put-in site.
- All boaters must have a U.S. Coast Guard approved whitewater PFD.
- Rafts must carry an extra paddle, first aid kit, repair kit, and an extra PFD.
- Portable toilets and stoves or firepans with charcoal are mandatory for overnight boating parties.
- Private motorized crafts prohibited.
- Maximum stay in the wilderness is two nights. Boaters may spend only one night per designated campsite.

BLACK CANYON OF THE GUNNISON NATIONAL PARK

The Gunnison River through the national park is extremely dangerous due to difficult rapids and portages. However, well prepared kayakers will find the canyon challenging. The river is classified as Class V to unnavigable.

- All boaters must have a U.S. Coast Guard approved whitewater (Type I, II, III, or V) PFD.
- Wood fires are prohibited.
- Pack out everything, including trash, used toilet paper, and cigarette butts.
- Obtain a backcountry permit at the South Rim Visitor Center or the East Portal bulletin board at the put-in.
- It is wise to have an experienced kayaker who has been down this stretch of the river before.

Rafting in Gunnison Gorge NCA

Activities

	Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP	Curecanti NRA	Gunnison Gorge NCA
Visitor Center	●	●	
Ranger Programs	●	●	
Picnic Areas	●	●	●
Boat Rentals		●	
Boat Tours		●	
Backcountry/ Wilderness Permits	●		●
Developed Camping	●	●	
Backcountry Camping	●	●	●
Group Camping		●	
Showers		●	
Fishing (lake)		●	
Fishing (river/stream)	●	●	●
Hiking	●	●	●
Rock Climbing	●	●	
Horse Trail	●	●	●
Kayaking (river)	●	●	●
Rafting (river)		●	●
Personal Water Craft		●	
Motorboats/Sailing		●	
Hunting		●	●
Snowmobiling	●	●	
Cross-country Skiing	●		
Mountain Biking			●
4WD/OHV		●	●

Let's Go for a Hike!

Black Canyon of the Gunnison

South Rim Hikes	Mileage (Round Trip)
Rim Rock Trail: An easy rim-hugging hike.	2 (3.2 km)
Warner Point Trail: Looking for beautiful mountain vistas and canyon views? Then this moderate trail is for you!	1.5 (2.4 km)
Oak Flat Loop Trail: This challenging hike is short but steep. It drops 400 feet through aspen and Douglas-fir.	2 (3.2 km)
Uplands Trail: This moderate trail winds through the oak brush. Keep a look out for mule deer and other wildlife.	2 (3.2 km)
North Rim Hikes	
North Vista Trail: Follow this beautiful but strenuous trail to the summit of Green Mountain. It climbs 840 feet and offers breathtaking views at Exclamation Point.	7 (11.3 km)
Chasm View Nature Trail: An easy stroll to the narrowest part of the canyon.	1/3 (0.54 km)
Dead Horse Trail: This longer trail offers views of steep cliffs and pinnacles.	6.5 (10.5 km)

Curecanti

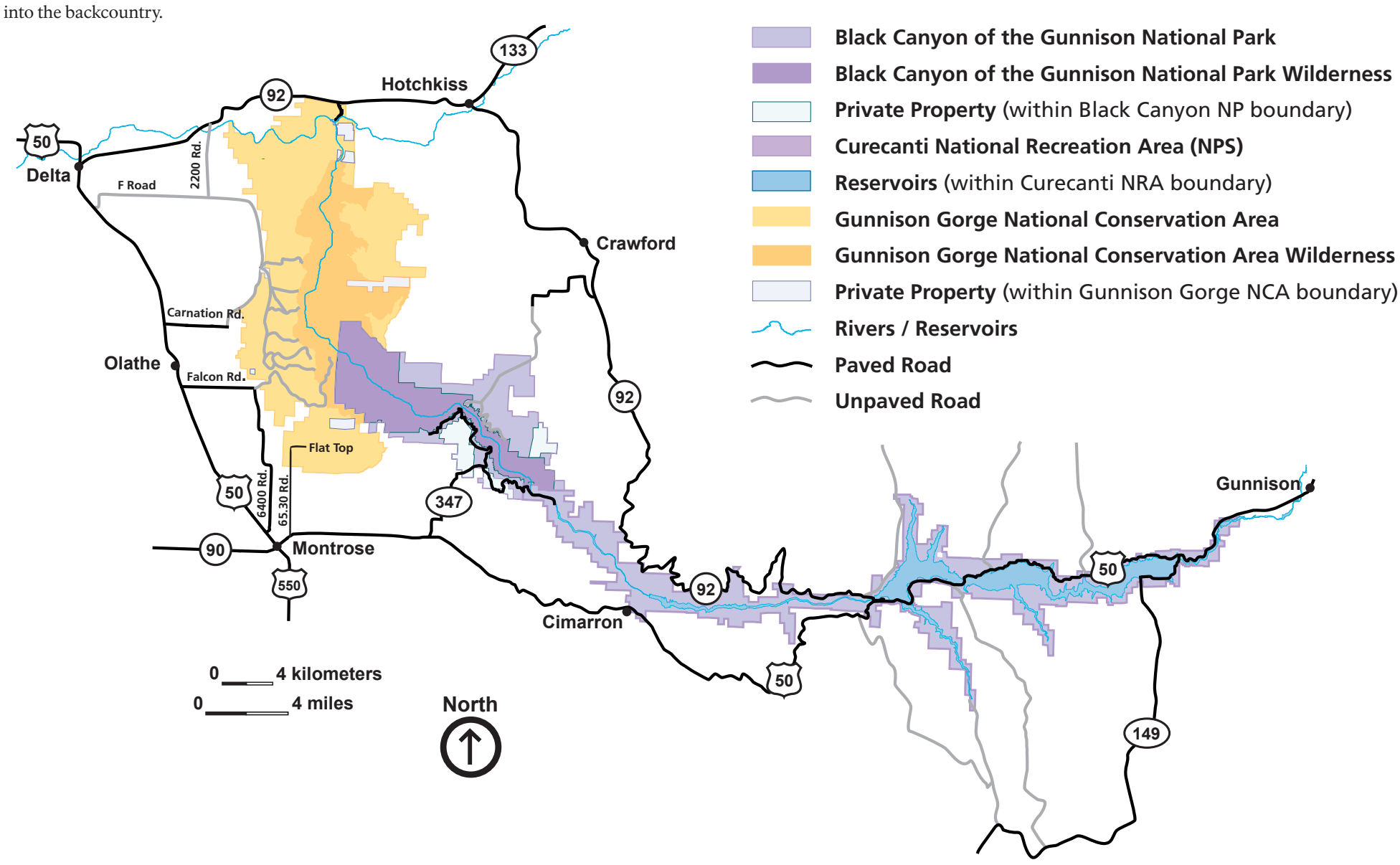
	Mileage (Round Trip)
Neversink Trail: An easy wildlife watching trail.	1.5 (2.4 km)
Mesa Creek Trail: This easy to moderate trail follows a foot bridge over the Gunnison River to view sheer canyon walls.	1.5 (2.4 km)
Crystal Creek Trail: Hike through aspen and oak brush on moderate terrain for ridgetop views of Crystal Reservoir.	5 (9 km)
Dillon Pinnacles Trail: Enjoy a moderate hike through sagebrush and conifers for a view of one of Curecanti's famous landmarks.	4 (6.6 km)
Pine Creek Trail: This hike descends to the old railroad bed along Pine Creek to Morrow Point Reservoir.	2 (3.2 km)
Curecanti Creek Trail: This strenuous hike drops 900 feet and includes dramatic views of the 700 foot Curecanti Needle.	4 (6.6 km)
Hermits Rest Trail: For more of a challenge, hike 1800 feet down to Morrow Point Reservoir on this difficult trail.	6 (10 km)

Gunnison Gorge

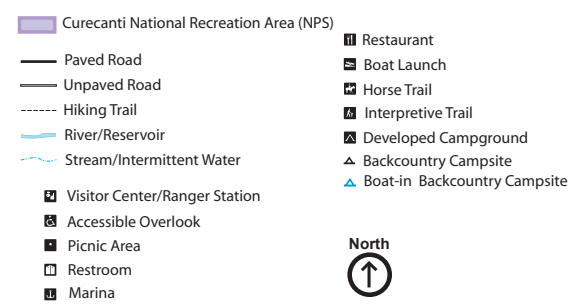
Chukar Trail: This steep trail descends Chukar Wash and provides floating access and hiking upstream into Black Canyon. Heavy summer use.	2.2 (3.5 km)
Ute Trail: A lengthy, well defined trail that descends gradually to the river and offers impressive views of the river, towering cliffs, and the canyon.	11 (17.7 km)
Bobcat Trail: The 1st mile of gradual hiking offers stunning views of the Gorge. The final 1/2 mile is very steep and requires some scrambling .	3 (4.8 km)
Duncan Trail: This is similar to the Bobcat trail, but more defined. Offers a gradual descent through pinyon-juniper woodlands, excellent river views and a unique look and the "double canyon" of the Gorge. The final descent is extremely steep. This trail is not recommended for horses.	3 (4.8 km)
Eagle Valley Trail: A fun family hike through the adobe badland formations and scenic canyon. Open to mountain bikes, motorcycles and horses.	2 (3.3 km)
Sunset Rocks Trail: Multiuse single track through colorful adobe formations and pinyon-juniper woodlands. Connects to Eagle Valley Trail.	6 (9.7 km)
Black Ridge Trail: Multiuse single track until it reaches the Ute Trail from the south. North of the Ute trailhead it is a two track 4WD/OHV trail.	25 (40.2 km)
West River Trail: This is a moderate single track hiking trail on the west side to the Gunnison River. It provides 3 miles of Gold Medal fishing access on the Gunnison main stem.	7 (11.2 km)

Black Canyon, Curecanti, and Gunnison Gorge Area Map

The maps below are designed for general travel only. They should not be used for trips into the backcountry.



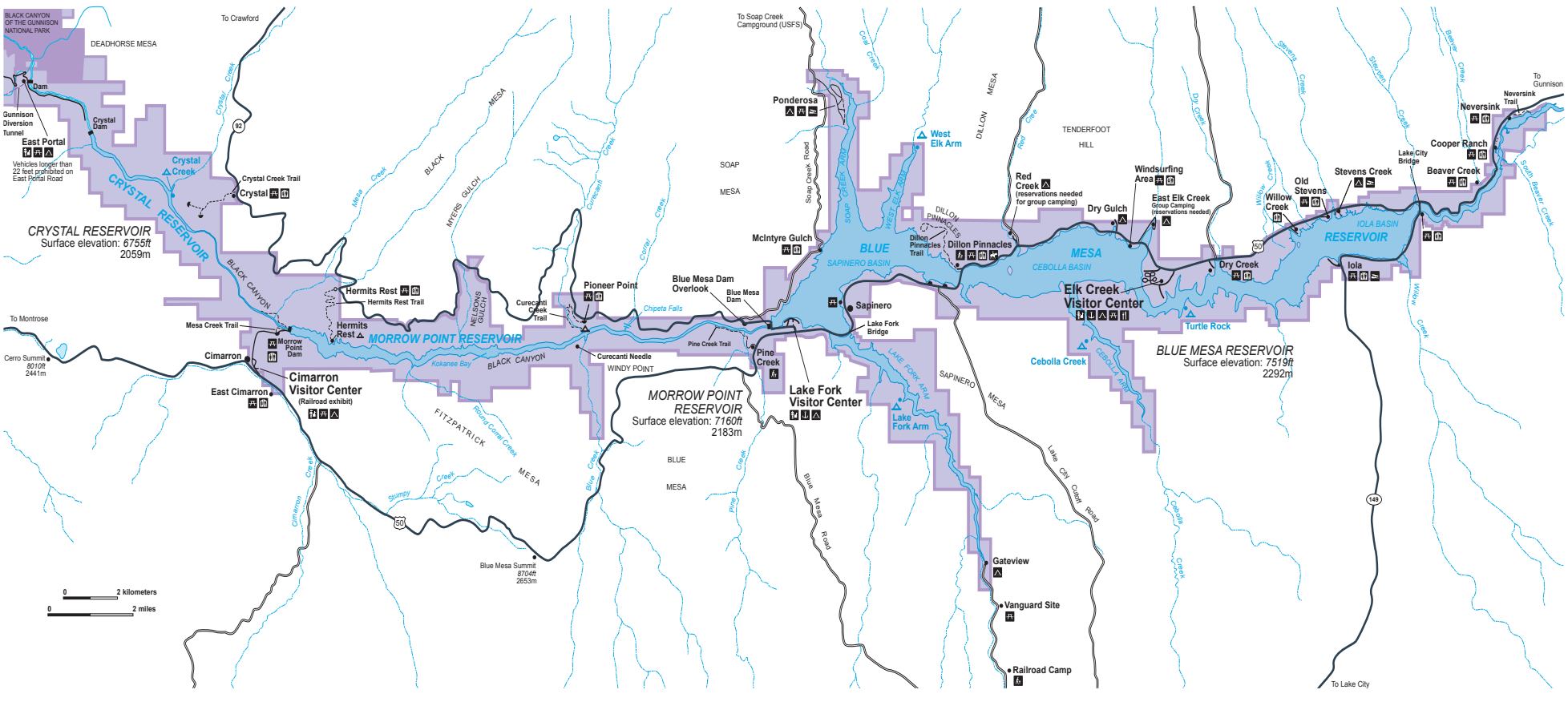
Curecanti National Recreation Area



Curecanti Fishing Limits

(For a full list of fishing regulations, visit our website at www.nps.gov/cure.)

Species	Daily Bag	Possession
Trout (In aggregate)	4	8
Brook Trout < 8”	10	10
Lake Trout (Blue Mesa)	8	8
Lake Trout (Morrow Point, Crystal)	4	8
Kokanee salmon	10	10
Yellow Perch, White Suckers, Crayfish	Unlimited	Unlimited



Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

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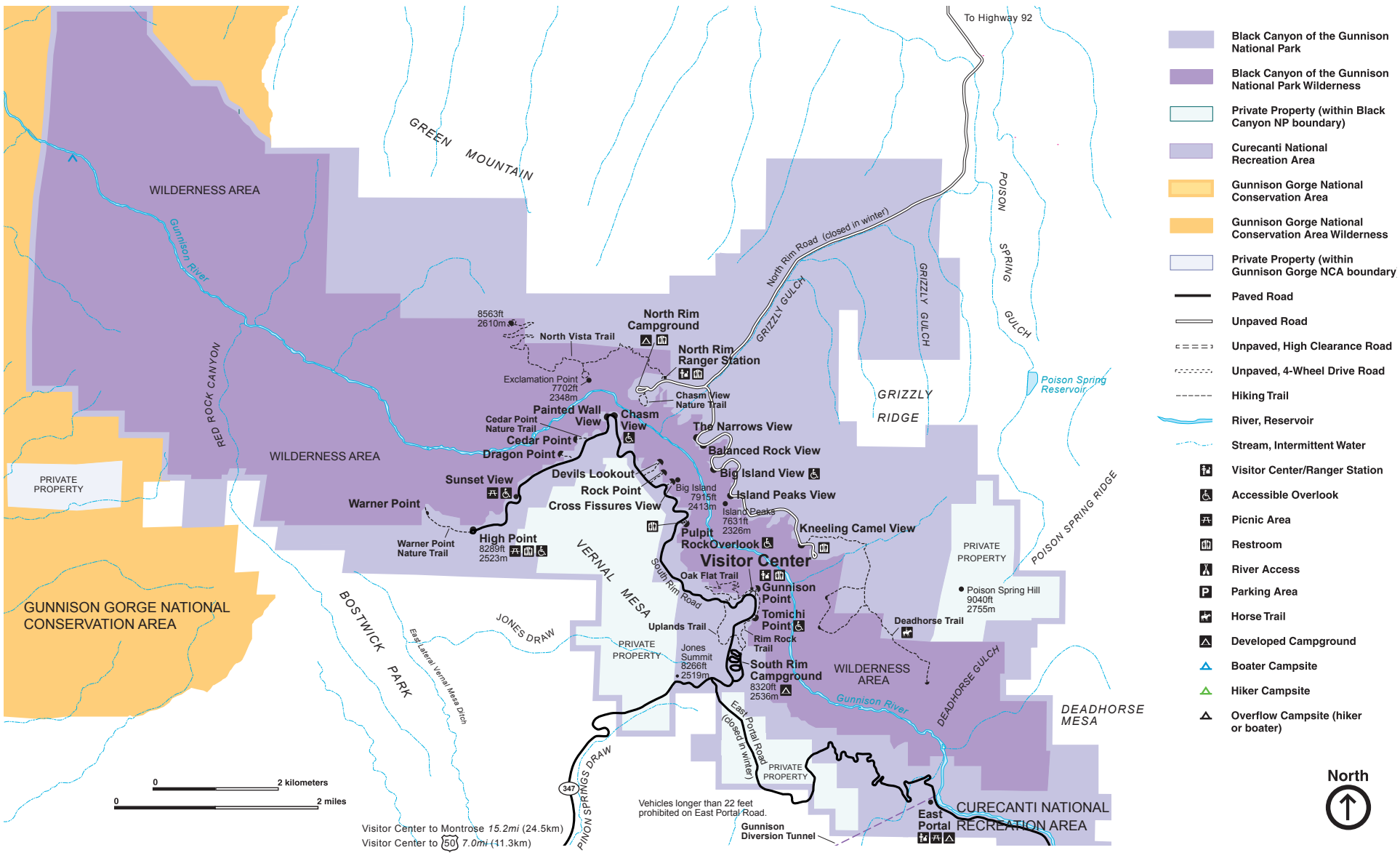
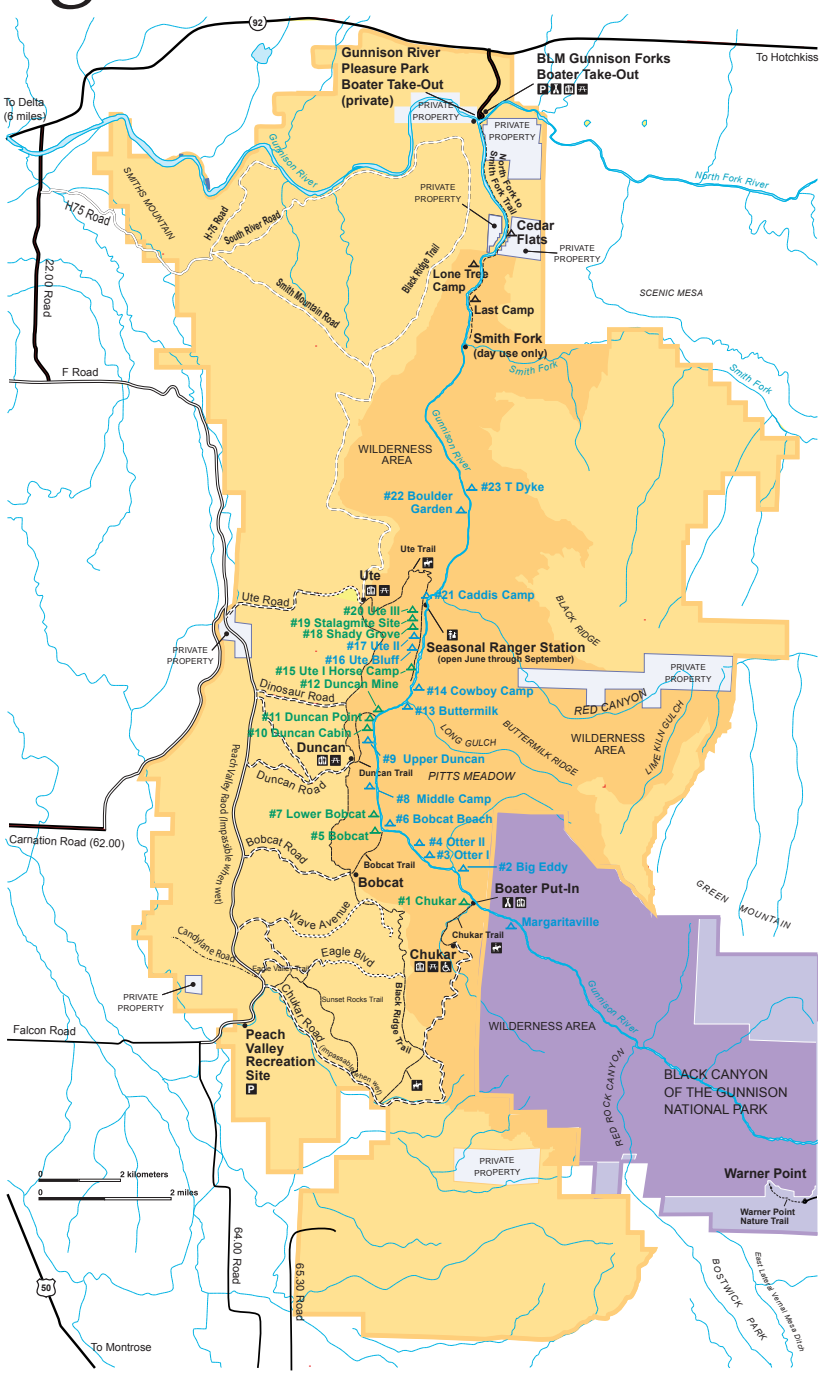


Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area

The map below is designed for general travel only. It should not be used for trips into the backcountry.

Inviting canyons and the blue-green waters of the Gunnison River draw visitors to hike, raft, and kayak in Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area.



Gunnison Gorge Wilderness Regulations

Areas below the canyon rims from the National Park boundary to two miles north of the Smith Fork confluence are designated as wilderness.

- All wilderness visitors are required to register and pay user fees.
- Camp in designated sites only.
- Maximum group size is 12 people.
- Maximum stay length for all users is two nights. Boaters may only stay one night at any boater campsite.
- Wood fires are prohibited in the wilderness and the entire river corridor to the North Fork confluence.
- Washable, reusable toilet systems are required for all overnight boaters and groups on horseback.
- All trash must be packed out. Strain all dishwater.
- Motorized river craft are prohibited in the wilderness area.
- Mountain bikes and motorized vehicles are prohibited below the canyon rim.
- Commercial operators must carry a copy of their permit while in the Gorge.

Science in the Parks

HELP US STOP THE SPREAD OF AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

Can you imagine Blue Mesa Reservoir without a world class kokanee salmon fishery? Or the Gunnison River choked with thick mats of algae or plants? Or perhaps the bottom of the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River covered with millions of tiny snails that trout won't eat?

Neither can we.

The National Park Service is serious about preventing invasive aquatic species and asks for your help in keeping your rivers and reservoirs clean, clear, and fishable.

There is no cost-effective or permanent way to eliminate any of these species once they are introduced.

For New Zealand Mudsnail:

- Clean and inspect: Rinse and inspect all gear and equipment before you leave or enter an area. Clean gear of all material coming from the water. Examples include scrubbing boot soles, rinsing waders, and draining cooling and live well water away from shore.
- Dry: Completely dry all gear and boating equipment for 48 hours before using in a different area. Multiple sets of gear are suggested for travelers visiting many areas.
- Freeze, soak, or spray: Alternative cleaning methods include freezing gear overnight, soaking gear in hot water for 5 minutes and applying Formula 409 (tm) for 5 minutes. Dispose of all chemicals properly.

For the Zebra Mussel:

- Remember to remove any visible vegetation from items that were in the water.
- Flush engine cooling system, live wells, and bilge with tap water. Use hot water if possible.
- Do not re-use bait if exposed to infected waters.
- Dry boat and other equipment for at least 48 hours before using in unifested waters.
- Examine boat exterior for mussels if it has been docked in infested waters. If mussels are found or exterior is heavily fouled by algae, clean fouled surfaces or leave the boat out of the water for at least five days before entering uninfested waters.

Remember that mud, sand, plant fragments, and gravel in and on your gear are all signs that aquatic invasive species, notably mudsnails, may be hiding in your boots, nets, trailers, or boats.

The National Park Service needs your help to stop the spread of these aquatic invasive species.

For more information on what you can do to help, ask a ranger or visitor center staff or visit any of these websites:

www.100thmeridian.org
www.protectyourwaters.net
www.wildlife.state.co.us

Aquatic invasive species like the zebra mussel pose a threat to Colorado's waters.

Researchers test water quality in Soap Creek within Curecanti National Recreation Area.

WATER QUALITY: HOW GOOD IS IT?

One of the countless natural attractions of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Curecanti National Recreation Area is the clear, cold water that provides great fishing, boating, and other recreational activities.

The National Park Service has studied its rivers, streams, and reservoirs for over a decade and has found that the quality of water is exceptionally good.

How good is it? In some cases, the water quality of streams and reservoirs can be 5, 10, or even 100 times better than standards set by the State of Colorado to protect fish and other aquatic animals, and human health.

What does that mean? The National Park Service feels that the quality of water within Black Canyon and Curecanti is a very special resource that deserves additional protection so that it can be enjoyed by future generations in its current state.

How do we do that? The National Park Service is working with local, state, and federal interests to determine if a special water quality designation is appropriate to protect this important resource.

When will it happen? A rich mixture of activities takes place in the Gunnison Basin on private, state, and federal lands. The minimal impact of these activities has contributed to the high water quality that is found at Black Canyon and Curecanti. The National Park Service needs to be responsive to these activities and will formally embark upon a special designation when issues that have been raised are addressed.

If water quality is so exceptional, is it safe to drink? The studies have looked at only one of the many things that can make humans sick from drinking stream or reservoir water in the Gunnison Basin. It is strongly recommended that all water from streams, rivers, and reservoirs be filtered through a proper filter or adequately boiled before drinking, no matter how clean it appears to be.

The National Park Service is charged with protecting all park resources, including water quality, for future generations. The parks will continue to monitor water quality to keep it safe for swimming, boating, and recreating.

Soap Creek Curecanti National Recreation Area

BACKCOUNTRY PLAN

There are about 15,000 acres of designated Wilderness in Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. This land is protected by the legislation and provides a unique and wild place for visitors and wildlife alike. Although these lands are wild, they do, however, need a helping hand from time to time.

The National Park Service is rewriting its Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan to help protect the wilderness and other backcountry areas and to provide places for everyone to enjoy backcountry experiences. This plan will look at several issues affecting visitors' backcountry experiences.

The plan will be available for public comment sometime in the spring or summer of 2007. Contact the park for more information.

ELK ON THE MOVE AT BLACK CANYON

A multi-agency research project, including Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, is examining how traffic affects elk migration.

The population of elk that spends summers on Black Mesa and in the West Elk Mountains and migrates to winter range in and near the north rim of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park has been increasing. Managers from many agencies worry that high densities of elk within their winter range could eventually cause damage to the park.

Researchers at Colorado Division of Wildlife think that late summer OHV traffic in the Gunnison National Forest encourages early movement of these elk herds to winter range, where the national park and adjacent private lands offer the elk refuge from hunting pressure. As a result, the population is not being controlled by hunter harvesting.

Researchers at the U.S. Geological Survey are leading the research project, collecting data throughout the elk's summer and winter range, monitoring traffic volume and locating elk fitted with GPS collars.

After a few years of observing traffic and elk movement patterns, researchers hope to determine how OHV traffic influences elk migration. If traffic is found to influence elk movements, Forest Service managers may decide to change traffic or public access policies. This would keep more elk on public lands during hunting season, allowing the population to be culled. This study would continue to determine whether management changes are effective.

Choose Your Own Adventure

Many adventures await you, no matter which area you visit. From hiking and climbing to fishing and snowmobiling, Black Canyon, Curecanti and Gunnison Gorge have a lot for everyone.

Fishing the Gunnison River in Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

Kayaking in Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area.

Camping at Curecanti National Recreation Area.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison

HIKING

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park offers a variety of hiking opportunities both on the rim and in the canyon itself. See the hiking section on page 3 for more details about hiking in the park. Winter offers great opportunities for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing along the rim.

VENTURING INTO THE CANYON

Backcountry trips into the wilderness of the inner canyon are challenging. Routes are steep, unmaintained, and unmarked. Permits are required for all parties attempting any backcoutry route. Backcountry camping is available. Hikers should be well prepared with food and water. Check with a ranger before attempting a trip into the canyon for current route information.

CLIMBING AND BOULDERING

There are a number of technical climbing routes in the Black Canyon. Most climbs are long, multipitch routes and are not for novice climbers. Access is difficult, but with the right amount of skill and preparation, climbing in the canyon can be a rewarding adventure.

For those interested in something that stays a little closer to the ground, there are a number of bouldering problems in the park. Check with rangers for more information.

RANGER PROGRAMS

Ranger-led activities are a great way to learn about the park. Overlook talks and campfire programs are offered in the summer and special programs are offered throughout the winter. Check with a ranger for more information.

DRIVING TOURS

Both Rims of Black Canyon offer beautiful canyon views without going too far from your car. The South Rim Drive is paved and offers 12 view points along the way. Some are right on the road and others involve short strolls on well maintained trails. Choose your adventure and take in as many as you wish, but all of them offer unique views into the depths of the canyon.

The North Rim Drive is a road less traveled. Many prefer the relative solitude that this drive offers. It is a dirt road open generally from late March through mid-late November depending on the weather. The North Rim Drive offers stunning vistas and 6 dramatic overlooks of the canyon, most of which are along the road.

Curecanti

HIKING

Curecanti offers hiking for a wide variety of skill levels over diverse terrain. Trail descriptions are listed on page 3. Trails within Curecanti National Recreation Area are pet-friendly and offer great opportunities to view unique geological formations.

DRIVING TOURS

Scenic sections of U.S. Highway 50 are adjacent to Blue Mesa Reservoir. A short detour to Cimmarron will take you through railroad exhibits and to a view of Morrow Point Dam. Continuing on Highway 50 offers views of unique geologic formations and panoramas of surrounding mountains.

For views of Morrow Point Reservoir, turn onto Highway 92 at Lake Fork towards Black Canyon's North Rim. This drive offers dizzying views.

BOATING AND WATER RECREATION

Blue Mesa Reservoir is the largest body of water in Colorado, and combined with Morrow Point and Crystal Reservoirs, offers a great deal of recreational opportunities from motor and sail boating, windsurfing, and jet skiing in the summer to snowmobiling and ice fishing in the winter. Check boating and fishing regulations before heading out on the water.

Marinas and boat put-ins are located throughout Blue Mesa with easy access to the reservoir. Morrow Point and Crystal Reservoirs are trickier with regards to boat access, but many people enjoy kayaking and fishing using other small, hand-carried crafts. Ranger-led boat tours are available in the summer on Morrow Point Reservoir. Call the Elk Creek Visitor Center at (970) 641-2337 ext. 205 for more information.

Cyclists enjoy touring along the reservoirs of Curecanti NRA in events such as Ride the Rockies.

Visitors fish the deep blue waters of Blue Mesa Reservoir.

Gunnison Gorge

HIKING AND BACKPACKING

Hiking and backpacking within Gunnison Gorge offers scenic backdrops including adobe "moonscapes", colorful sandstone canyons, and the towering black walls of the Gunnison Gorge river canyon. Whether hiking for the joy of hiking or to launch a raft or kayak, every trail is an adventure. Remember that much of the inner canyon is wilderness and provides a uniquely rugged experience. Pets are allowed on all NCA trails but be sure bring along extra water for them! See trail descriptions for details.

DRIVING ADVENTURES

Driving in the Conservation Area can be a great adventure. Take a drive through scenic adobe badland formations along Peach Valley Road or enjoy beautiful river views while looking for that fishing spot along the NCA's South River Road. Check out spectacular views of the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness from the Smith Mountain jeep road.

BOATING AND WATER RECREATION

The Gunnison Gorge NCA provides a number of river access sites for non-motorized boating and fishing.

Whitewater enthusiasts will find outstanding scenery and technical (Class II-IV) rapids within the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness which is accessed via the 1 mile Chukar Trail. You can pack in your own gear or arrange for a horse pack in (970-323-0115).

Looking for calmer waters for your canoe or raft? Launch at the Gunnison Forks or make arrangements with the Gunnison River Pleasure Park (970-872-2525) to jet boat you and your gear 4 miles upstream to the Smith Fork and enjoy a scenic, leisurely float back.

Don't have a raft? Rent one at Pleasure Park or contact BLM for a list of permitted river outfitters.

HORSEBACK RIDING AND BIKING

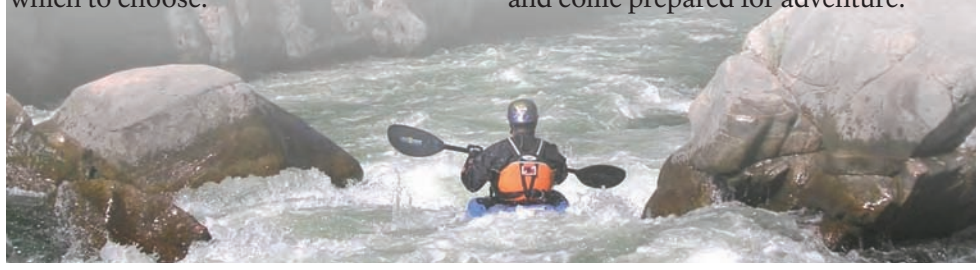
Saddle up your horse or mountain bike and head to the NCA for scenic riding through adobe badlands and pinyon-juniper woodlands. Take in views of mountains, valleys, and the colorful cliffs and canyons of Gunnison Gorge from the Black Ridge Trail or Smith Mountain jeep roads. Riders may want to take their fishing poles on the 4.5 mile Ute Trail to the river. The Bobcat and Duncan trails are not horse-friendly due to very steep drop off areas.

Mountain bikes are not permitted within the Wilderness but there are plenty of other great riding areas from which to choose.

OFF HIGHWAY VEHICLE USE (OHV)

Unload your OHV at the Gunnison Gorge NCA Peach Valley Recration Site and ride over 75 miles of designated motorcycle single track and ATV trails within the 9,800 acre Flat Top-Peach Valley OHV Recreation Area. The area offers two OHV play areas, one at Falcon Road and one at Flat Top, for cross-country riding.

Check out trailhead kiosks for trails and riding regulations. Your OHV must be registered with the Colorado State OHV program and your registration decals must be properly affixed to your OHV Vehicle. Wear your safety gear and come prepared for adventure.



Black Canyon Backcountry Regulations

- Permits (at no charge) are required for ALL inner canyon use.
- Reservations are required for Red Rock Canyon and a $7.00 park entrance fee is charged at the trailhead. Contact (970) 641-2337 ext. 205.
- Pets are prohibited in the Wilderness area and on all inner canyon routes.
- Hunting and possession of firearms are prohibited.
- A valid Colorado fishing license is required. Gold Medal Water regulations apply. (See below.)
- Collecting anything within the national park is prohibited, including wood, flowers, plants, animals, antlers, historical artifacts, and/or rocks.
- Follow "Leave No Trace" ethics.
- Use pit toilets if available. If not, bury human waste six inches deep and away from the river. You can also use travel toilets which are available for purchase at the South Rim Visitor Center.
- Wood fires are prohibited. Use only camp stoves for cooking.
- Include these items in your pack:

  Extra food and clothing
  Plenty of water or a filter
  Camp stove
  First aid kit
  Matches/lighter
  Flashlight/headlamp
  Emergency blanket

Gold Medal Fishing Regulations

These regulations apply from 200 yards downstream of Crystal Dam to the North Fork Confluence.

- Fish with artificial lures and flies only.
- Return all brown trout 12-16 inches in length to the water immediately.
- The bag, posession, and size limit for brown trout is either:
  4 fish no greater than 12" long or
  3 fish no greater than 12" in length
  and 1 fish at least 16" in length
- All rainbow trout caught must be returned to the water immediately.

Volunteers Find New Ways to Give

Volunteers for the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management tirelessly put in thousands of hours each year helping to keep our public lands afloat.

What do you think of when you think about volunteering? Maybe you think of campground hosts or someone working at a visitor center. Two programs at Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge may change that image.

In the summer of 2006, Black Canyon launched its Volunteer Climbing Ranger Program. The program consisted of 9 volunteers who were not only skilled climbers trained in high angle rescue, but also paramedics, EMT's, first responders, and rescuers.

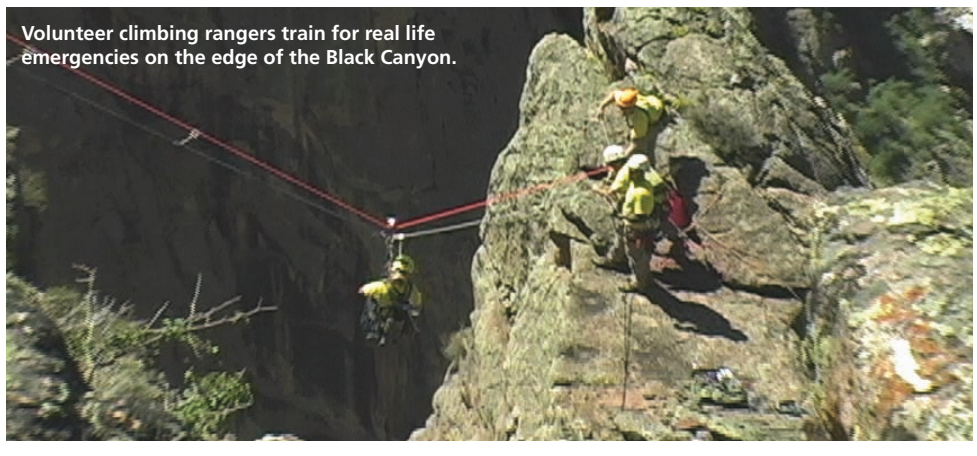
The program was established to help provide more up-to-date information to climbers and other park visitors regarding climbing and backcountry routes and to assist in emergencies.

These 9 volunteers logged 1,070 hours conducting climbing patrols, patrolling backcountry routes, cleaning up backcountry campsites, and attending search and rescue training.

Any rescue within the 2,000 foot deep chasm involves a tremendous amount of staffing and technical expertise. The volunteers were available by pager to lend their climbing, medical, and search and rescue skills to any rescue operation or incident within the park.

For volunteers wishing to lend their skills on the water, Gunnison Gorge also offers unique volunteer opportunities.

Volunteers get to enjoy the beauty of the gorge while assisting BLM river rangers with river patrols and resource projects on a two-day work patrol rafting 14 miles of the Gunnison River from the Chukar Trail to the Gunnison Forks. Volunteers have assisted with Tamarisk removal, building trails, planting trees, cleaning campsites, and monitoring wildlife.


Volunteer climbing rangers train for real life emergencies on the edge of the Black Canyon.

Volunteers must be physically fit to participate. The work is strenuous, but rewarding. Volunteers paddle challenging rapids in a remote wilderness. It is a great way for them to get their faces wet, their hands dirty, and experience an amazing whitewater trip.

Included in the adventure is a two-day rafting trip and a Gunnison Gorge Annual Day Use Pass for lending a hand. Trips fill fast. Contact the BLM in the early spring to get on the list.

The parks and public lands are grateful to all of the volunteers who generously donate their time and skills in visitor centers, on the river, and on the rocks to help protect resources and visitors.

To volunteer at any of the three areas, please give us a call. For Black Canyon or Curecanti, please contact Kathleen Gonder at (970) 641-2337 ext. 229. For volunteer opportunities in Gunnison Gorge please contact Julie Stotler or Kevin Cohenour at (970) 240-5300.

Science in the National Conservation Area

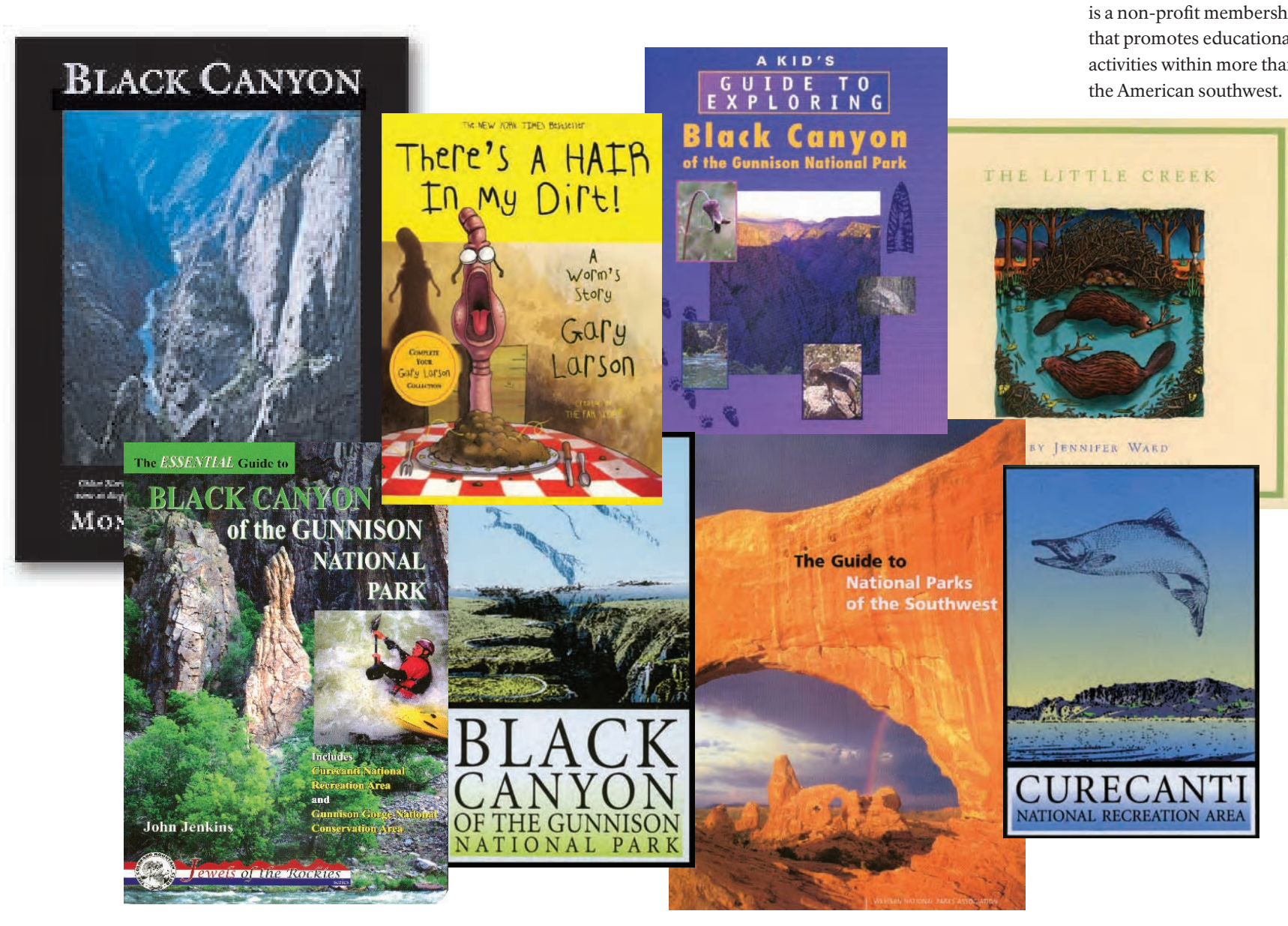
Researchers look for clues to the past in Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area.

SEARCHING FOR CLUES IN THE MUD OF THE ADOBE BADLANDS

What makes a "badland" formation go "bad?" In the Gunnison Gorge NCA it's 135 million year old MUD + RAIN + WIND. The unusual adobe badlands along the NCA's western side are composed of highly erosive Mancos Shale, a sedimentary rock that was deposited by an ancient salt sea during the Upper Cretaceous Period and then shaped by wind and water erosion. Careful searching in the shale reveals fossils of clams, ammonites (extinct shell fish related to the modern chambered nautilus) and shark teeth. Even though the soil looks bare, it is actually full of life. Biological soil crusts, usually visible as bumpy, dark-colored soil surfaces, are highly specialized communities of mosses, lichens, and cyanobacteria that help reduce erosion, increase water retention, improve soil fertility, and provide habitat for native plant and animal species, including rare plants such as the endangered clay-loving buckwheat. The BLM and the U.S. Geological Survey conduct numerous research projects in the adobes to find out more about these unique landscapes and determine the best ways to protect and manage them.

More Ways to Explore

Visit our bookstore in person or online at www.nps.gov/blca or www.nps.gov/cure. Call us at 970-249-1914 ext. 423.

WESTERN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION

WESTERN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION is a non-profit membership organization that promotes educational and scientific activities within more than 70 park sites in the American southwest.