



Floating the Gunnison River

Lower Gunnison River, Delta to Whitewater

The Lower Gunnison River flows 39 miles from the boat launch at Confluence Park in Delta, to the take-out in Whitewater. To shorten the trip, start downstream in Escalante Canyon (29 miles to Whitewater), or in Bridgeport (14 miles to Whitewater). Much of the river here flows through Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area, with numerous camping opportunities and several Class I and II rapids. The boating season begins as early as April, and extends into October. Streamflows earlier in the season are colder and faster and are best suited for rafts. Later in the season, the river is popular for canoes and stand up paddleboards. Expect 2-3 days to float this entire stretch of river. BLM River Rangers seasonally patrol the river and can be a resource as you explore the National Conservation Area.

Everyone has different interpretations of the difficulty of a river. The kind of craft you are in, your level of experience, risk tolerance, and river flow are all factors that can affect the difficulty of a river. Class I and II rapids can be defined as follows:

- Class I – Fast moving water with riffles and small waves. Few obstructions, all obvious and easily missed with little training. Risk to swimmers is slight; self-rescue is easy.
- Class II - Straightforward rapids with wide, clear channels which are evident without scouting. Occasional maneuvering may be required, but rocks and medium-sized waves are easily missed by trained paddlers. Swimmers are seldom injured and group assistance, while helpful, is seldom needed.

Some notable features along the Lower Gunnison include:

- Hail Mary Rapid (~1 mile downstream of Escalante Canyon) is a long wave train that can be circumvented to the left.
- Immediately downstream from the mouth of Dominguez Canyon there is a large island. The right channel is broad, shallow, and rocky. There is a deeper, narrower channel on the left that provides good boat passage. The current tends to push boats into a hazardous, overhanging boulder on the upper left side of the channel. Avoid the hazard by stopping at the head of the island and walking boats past the boulder. Some boaters refer to this rock as the Undertaker.
- Note: Colorado regulations require all boats to have a USCG-approved personal flotation device (PFD) for each person aboard. All children under the age of 13 must wear a PFD at all times.



Permit Requirements

All overnight boaters are required to self-issue a free camping permit. These are located at the Escalante Boat Launch and at Bridgeport. Further instructions are located on site. The permit is a helpful required tool to inform users of the river regulations and to provide the BLM with important data regarding river recreation use patterns. If you plan to begin your trip in Delta, fill out a permit at the Escalante Boat Launch during your shuttle.

Boat Put-Ins and Take-Outs

- Confluence Park in Delta is located at 440 North Palmer Street, a short distance northwest of the intersection of US Highway 50 and CO 92 in Delta, Colorado. This spacious put-in has ample room to sort and organize equipment.
- The Escalante Boat Launch is located on Escalante Canyon Road about 3 miles from US Highway 50. It is a maintained road with a large parking area. The put-in has a very small eddy, and can be hard to catch if you're trying to take-out there; if you are putting in there, there is a large boulder in the river that you encounter as soon as you put-in (you can see it from the boat ramp).
- Bridgeport is located off Hwy 50 at the end of Bridgeport Road. It is a narrow road with a large parking lot but can be full on weekend days in the spring and fall. It is not suitable for boating access except for smaller craft like kayaks or canoes. Boaters must access the river via a trail that passes under the railroad bridge. The trail is narrow, and the boat launch may be inaccessible at high river flows. Walking over the tracks is illegal (trespass).



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- The Whitewater takeout is located off Highway 50. Turn left at the intersection of Highway 50 and Highway 141 and follow the signs to the boat launch. The takeout is narrow, so if people have multiple boats on a trip they need to be spaced out enough so that one boat pulls in and is carried out of the way before the next boat arrives. People must carry boats and gear about 100 yards to get to the parking area from the boat ramp. There is signage about a ½ mile upstream to alert boaters of the take-out.
- Do not leave valuables in vehicles. Unattended vehicles at river access points are often targeted by thieves. Report any illegal activity to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office at 970-242-6707, Delta County Sheriff's Office at 970-874-2000, or 911.

Other Considerations

Poison Ivy

There's quite a bit of poison ivy on the banks of the river, so beware of brushing up against the vegetation along the river.

Private Land

There's a lot of private land along the way interspersed with public land. Some is obvious and well-marked. Other parcels are not. You are responsible for knowing where the public land is located.

Weather

At times, wind can really kick up in the afternoons, making boating challenging. In the summer, the area is subject to monsoonal rain that can cause lightning hazards, flooding, and other safety concerns.

Human Waste and Campfires

You must pack out human waste and ash from fire pans; firepans are required if you have a fire, though gas stoves are least impactful to the fragile desert environment. Firewood collection, except for driftwood, is prohibited along the river.

Dogs

Your dogs must be on leash at boat put-ins and in Big Dominguez Canyon to minimize wildlife and recreation user conflict. In all other areas your dog must be under voice control.

Group Size

Group size along the river is limited to 25, including dogs.



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Motor Boats

Motorized use is allowed along the Gunnison River. Visitors can expect to see both motorized and non-motorized craft. BLM boat launches and campsites are closed to motorized boats from May 1 through Labor Day weekend.

- *Floaters:* Be aware that powerboats can only travel in narrow channels in some sections of the river. Even though float boats have the right-of-way in the river, powerboats work hard coming upstream. As a courtesy, pull to one side of the channel, if possible, when you see a powerboat coming and let it by.
- *Powerboaters:* You must also slow to a “no wake” speed at boat landing facilities. Be cautious and courteous when passing other boats, especially when they are moored along shore. Slow down if possible, and give them a wide berth.

Bugs

The gnats and no-see-ums can be brutal during the summer. Bug spray and nets are recommended.

Camps

The BLM is in the process of formally designating campsites. You may currently camp on all public land along the river. Several primitive campsites exist beginning approximately 4 miles from the Escalante Boat Launch, and continue for approximately 12 miles. There are no amenities at these camps.

Hikes from the river

Dominguez Canyon is a popular stop along the way, with primitive camping, hidden rock art, and a breathtaking waterfall. Please respect the sensitive bighorn sheep that make their home in the canyon by keeping your dog on leash. Please do not touch the rock art.

Commercial Outfitters

Commercial Outfitters are required to have a Special Recreation Permit with the BLM and a River Outfitter License with the state of Colorado. Contact the Montrose or Grand Junction BLM offices for a list of permitted outfitters.

Streamflow Data

Current streamflow data can be obtained from the [United States Geologic Survey](#) by checking the Lower Gunnison River gages in Delta or Grand Junction.

Maps

A georeferenced map of the area can be found [here](#).



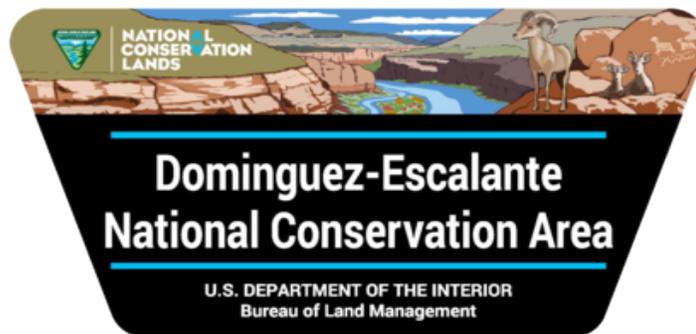
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Lower Gunnison River Boating and Camping Management

The BLM seeks your input on how to manage camping and boating activities along the Lower Gunnison River through Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area.

To provide the best camping and boating experience along the Gunnison River, the BLM would like your help. Have you floated other rivers with managed camping? You can let us know what you liked and what you prefer!

Please consider providing a comment, suggestion, or resource through <https://go.usa.gov/xvbXp>. Your recommendations and considerations will be used to inform the BLM as we move towards an Environmental Assessment, slated for the fall of 2020.



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