

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**



Colorado



BLM

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## Dolores River Information



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The Dolores River flows for more than 200 miles through southwestern Colorado, starting high in the San Juan Mountains and descending to its confluence with the Colorado River near the Colorado-Utah border. The Dolores flows through five major western life zones, from the alpine life zone at its headwaters to the Upper Sonoran life zone along much of its lower reaches (6400 ft.- 5000 ft. elevation).

### Permits

Currently, **private permits are not required** for boating the Dolores River within Colorado. However, BLM requires all boaters to register at access points.

All overnight boating parties on the Dolores River are required to use:

- **Firepans** for all open fires
- **Porta-potty** for human waste
- **Strainer** for dishwater
- **"Scrim"** material is recommended for use as "kitchen" flooring

For information on boating from Bedrock to Gateway, contact:

Bureau of Land Management  
[Uncompahgre Field Office](#)  
 2505 South Townsend  
 Montrose, CO 81401  
 (970) 240-5300

**A permit is required** for all users boating the Dolores River in Utah (Gateway to Dewey Bridge). For information on this 32-mile stretch, contact:

Bureau of Land Management  
[Moab Field Office](#)  
 82 East Dogwood  
 Moab, Utah 84532  
 (435) 259-7012 8AM-12PM Mon-Fri

### Group Size Limits

- **25** people from Bradfield Recreation Site to Slick Rock
- **16** people from Slick Rock to Bedrock through the Wilderness Study Area

### Length of Season

In an average snowpack year, the river is floatable from late April to early June. In a very dry year, there may be no boatable flows at all.

### Flows

Flows on the lower Dolores River are controlled by spill releases from McPhee Reservoir, 12.5 miles upstream of the Bradfield launch site. The spill releases are managed by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). The BOR calculates their spill releases according to reservoir level, river inflow, and user demand (irrigation, municipal contracts, etc).

- BOR Spill releases: 970-565-7562

Recommended minimum flows:

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- 200 cfs....canoes/kayaks/inflatables
- 800 cfs....small rafts to 14 ft.
- 1000 cfs...large rafts to 18 ft.

### Maps

The ***Dolores River Guide*** covers 173 miles of the Dolores River from the Bradfield launch site to the river's confluence with the Colorado River in Utah. This 92-page waterproof guide includes detailed topographic maps showing river miles, campsites and launch sites as well as other useful information. It is available in Colorado from the Anasazi Heritage Center in Dolores (970-882-5600), the San Juan Mountains Association in Durango (970-247-4874), or in Dolores (970-882-7296) and local retail bookstores, boating shops and several mail-order suppliers.

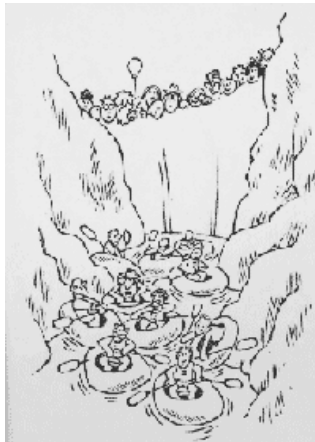
### Shuttle Services

- Bedrock - 970-859-7445
- Bedrock - 970-859-7297 or 970-428-9022
- Slick Rock - 970-677-2818 or 970-677-2301
- Slick Rock - 970-677-2772
- Moab - 435-259-7062

### Dogs

Due to problems with dogs on the Dolores River (feces around campsites, wildlife harassment, harassment of other boaters, etc.) dogs must be on a leash at campsites, put-ins/take-outs and whenever out of the boat. Dog feces must be carried out!

### Avoiding the Crowds



Memorial Day Weekend is the busiest time on the Dolores River. You may encounter 200+ people at either the Bradfield or Slick Rock launch sites on Saturday morning. Mountain Sheep and Gypsum Valley launch sites are less crowded. Most parties launch between 10:00 and 11:30 AM. Competition for campsites is greatest in the Slick Rock to Bedrock stretch where campsites are limited.

Avoid camping or having lunch at the bottom of Snaggletooth rapid on river left. A real "people/boat jam" develops here with boats recovering from "Snag" and portage groups reloading and launching. There are many nice lunch spots in the next mile.

Generally, you will encounter more boating groups on weekends than during the week.

Parties of 10 or less should use small camps and leave the larger camps for the larger groups. Also, try to avoid camping within sight or sound of other groups.

**Camp Snatching.** Some folks feel it is essential to send a kayak ahead to secure a camp; others find this highly offensive. Things go more smoothly **if this practice is avoided**. When passing another group late in the day, talk about camps. Deal with it. Try to camp at the site you have discussed.

***Be reasonable. Be flexible. Communicate. We are all, after all, in the same boat.***

### Minimizing Impact

By practicing the **7 Principles of Leave No Trace**, we can maintain a relatively pristine, untrampled corridor of unique wildlife, cultural and recreation resources for our future use and enjoyment.

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

### Safety Recommendations

- Weather during April and May can be quite cold and windy with occasional rain, and sometimes even a late season snowstorm. Hypothermia can result from this combination of factors, and boaters should be knowledgeable of its symptoms and treatment.
- Inflatable rafts should contain four air chambers.
- Each person **must wear** a Coast Guard approved type I, III, or V personal floatation device (PFD).
- Carry at least one spare oar or paddle, an adequate first aid kit, a patch/repair kit and an air pump per vessel.
- Reliable drinking water is not available from the Dolores or its tributaries. Boil, purify or carry the drinking water you will need. Drinking water is available at the Bradfield launch site.

### Infants & Small Children

- **Infants and small children do not belong** on the Dolores river if you answer **NO** to any of the following:
  - Can your child climb in & out of a boat by himself/herself?
  - Is your child strong enough to hold himself/herself in a moving or bouncing boat without being

- held by a parent?
- o Does your child have the knowledge, strength and skill to get to shore or back to a boat if he/she has fallen overboard?
- o Does your child have the knowledge, strength & skill to survive a swim in cold, moving water or rapids?
- o Does your child have the knowledge, strength & skill to grab hold of a thrown rope?
- The Dolores is a springtime river, which can mean very cold water and harsh changes in weather. **Make the right decision for your child's safety.** If you answered **no** to any of the previous questions, then a trip on the Dolores River may not be appropriate for your infant's or child's safety and enjoyment.

### Commercial Outfitters

Commercial outfitters are required to obtain a Special Use Recreation Permit from the BLM authorizing use of the Dolores River ([List of Authorized Outfitters](#)). For more information, contact:

BLM Tres Rios Field Office  
29211 Hwy 184  
Dolores, Colorado 81323

(970) 882-7296

Beware of contracting with an illegal guide for a river trip because:

- Your float trip may be cancelled in progress if your illegal guide is arrested while providing you services.
- You may have no legal claims for injury, damaged property or loss of payment for services.
- Knowingly contracting with an illegal guide could result in felony convictions for all persons involved.

Ask to be sure your guide is properly licensed:

- Are you registered with the Colorado Office of Outfitters Registration?
- Do you have a Bureau of Land Management permit to operate on the Dolores River?

Other Indicators:

- Guide refuses to give you a written contract and insists on cash remuneration.
- Guide counsels you not to talk to federal or state agencies.

### Bradfield Launch to Slick Rock

Maximum group size **25** persons

This is generally a two or three-day trip. One-day trips are possible between Bradfield Bridge and Mountain Sheep Point Recreation Site (19 miles). Total trip length from Bradfield Bridge to Slick Rock is 47 river miles.

**Shuttle distance** is approximately 40 miles/50 minutes **one way** via paved and gravel roads.

This stretch of river drops an average of 19 feet per mile and contains the most difficult and challenging whitewater on the Dolores River, including "Snaggletooth Rapid" (Class IV-V).

The access point to this segment of the river is the **Bradfield Recreation Site** on river left 1/4 mile downstream from the Bradfield Bridge.

The Bradfield Recreation Site offers campsites, toilets, potable water, and a gravel-surfaced parking area and boat launch ramp. Campsite fees are \$8.00 per night.

Sloping canyon walls covered with oakbrush and other shrubs characterize the first few miles of river below Bradfield Bridge. Then the canyon deepens, sandstone walls appear and groves of ponderosa pine and Douglas fir cover the benches along the river. This stretch of river is appropriately called "Ponderosa Gorge." The unique combination of pine groves and red sandstone cliffs makes this one of the most scenic segments of the Dolores River.

Approximately 19 miles downriver from Bradfield is the **Mountain Sheep Point Recreation Site**, which can be accessed by driving about 6 miles east from Dove Creek along gravel and dirt county roads. This access site has limited parking, a boat launch ramp, toilets, and limited primitive campsites just down river at the "Box Elder" campsite. No fees are charged for camping here. There is no potable water at this site.

**Snaggletooth Rapid** (Class IV-V) is located about eight miles below the Mountain Sheep Point Recreation Site near mile 27. This rapid has been portaged as often as successfully run. Stop and scout this rapid (river left).

Below Snaggletooth, the canyon becomes drier and the vegetation begins to change to that of Upper Sonoran life zone. Pinyon-juniper, yucca, cactus, and various shrubs are predominant. A few miles above Slick Rock, the canyon widens to rolling arid hills.

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### Slick Rock to Bedrock

Maximum group size **16** persons

This 50 mile segment of river drops an average of 10 feet per mile with fewer and less difficult rapids than the upper segment, though it still contains several short Class III drops.

The Slick Rock to Bedrock segment is normally run in two or three days. Trip length is 50 river miles or 36 river miles from Gypsum Valley to Bedrock.

**Shuttle distance** from Slick Rock to Bedrock is approximately 60 miles/90 minutes **one way** via paved roads.

The launch site is a cleared area just east of the Highway 141 Bridge at Slick Rock. **This is private property.**

There is no put-in fee. Parking directions will be posted. Please cooperate with the owners.

An alternate put-in is in **Big Gypsum Valley**, 14 miles downriver or 25 road miles from Slick Rock. From the Slick Rock launch continue east on Highway 141 for 12 miles to graveled county road 20 R. Turn left (west) and proceed 13 miles down 20 R to the **Gypsum Valley Recreation Site**. Facilities include a launch ramp, parking, picnic tables, grills, and shelters. There are no toilets or potable water at this site. Camping is allowed but is very primitive.

About 16.5 miles downstream of the Slick Rock launch site, just past the Gypsum Valley bridge, the river abruptly enters the 29,000 acre **Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area**. Here, the Dolores begins a series of meanders deeply entrenched in the massive sandstones of the area. The canyon is narrow and deep with towering walls that often reach skyward directly from the water's edge. Several large side canyons provide interesting hiking along this segment. Slick Rock Canyon ends abruptly at Bedrock where the river crosses Paradox Valley.

The **Bedrock access** is just south and west of the Bedrock Bridge. Facilities include a launch ramp, parking, picnic tables, grills and shelters. There are no toilets or potable water. Camping is allowed but is very primitive.

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**Tres Rios Field Office**  
**29211 Highway 184**  
**Dolores, Colorado 81323**  
**Phone: 970-882-7296**  
**FAX: 970-882-6841**  
**Connie Clementson, Field Manager**

Last updated: 08-17-2012

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