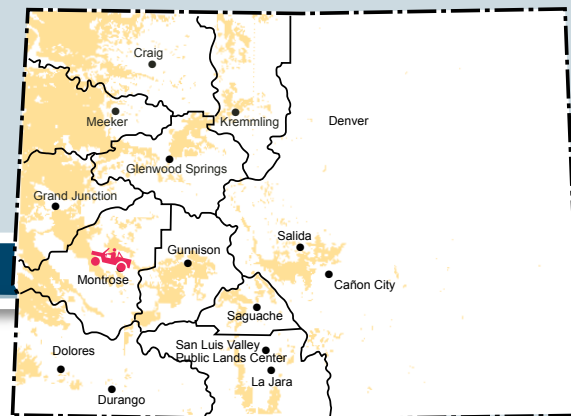


# COLORADO

## ROAD TRIP

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## Find and Lose Yourself on Colorado Public Lands

### Destination Dry Creek, Montrose County, Colorado

By Mel Lloyd

**I**n Colorado, there are endless places to explore on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. No matter where you travel in the state, you'll hear someone say, "Now this is Colorado!"

It's no different in Montrose County, Colorado, one of the nation's fastest growing counties, where the spectacular San Juan Mountain Range dominates the southern horizon. To the west looms the Uncompahgre Plateau. The Plateau is a distinctive up-lift in west-central Colorado that provides a vivid painter's palette of florescent fall yellows and oranges contrasted against that one-and-only bright Colorado blue sky. But, wait, there's more! As you look east, you'll see public lands lying in BLM's Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area and Gunnison Gorge Wilderness. Here, world-renowned gold medal trout fishing and heart-stopping whitewater rafting deep in the heart of wilderness await you.

For this month's Road Trip, we're taking you 6,000 feet above sea level to the Dry Creek Area, located about 10 miles northwest of Montrose and part of the Uncompahgre Plateau. It is managed by the BLM Uncompahgre Field Office. Choose your mode of travel: The 115,000-acre Dry Creek Area is especially popular with technical 4x4 enthusiasts from across the country. But they're not alone—ATVs, dirt bikers, hikers, horseback riders and mountain bikers also seek out the trails and routes crisscrossing the area's deep canyons that lead to the Gunnison River below. From mesa tops of Dakota Sandstone, to outcrops of the Jurassic Morrison Formation, to Mancos Shale, a varied and challenging terrain greets visitors, including those adventurous enough to scale the rugged canyon walls with nothing but their hands and feet. More likely than not, those choosing Dry Creek as their destination will experience sunny skies and warm temperatures year-round in this semi-arid climate.



Recreation and other uses co-exist here. BLM manages the nearby Camelback Wilderness Study Area (WSA) for those qualities inspiring such a designation. Many users willfully leave the motors behind for the WSA's quiet solitude and



remote experience that is unmarred by human imprints. The Dry Creek Area has long been used by local cattle and sheep ranchers for its grazing opportunities. Centuries ago, long before Winnebago and Polaris became household names, this area was a favorite hunting ground for ancestors of the Ute Tribes we know today. Remnants of hunting camps and pottery shards can still be found—and left intact for others to discover—if one looks carefully.

Visitors may also encounter abundant wildlife living within the diverse habitats of the area; a result of the varied topography, vegetation, soils and climate. Along the perennial streams, you'll find riparian vegetation, which may afford a glimpse of neo-tropical birds during the warm season. Cottonwood communities provide shade from the hot summer sun and the perfect hunting perch for pairs of wintering bald eagles. The gentle winter temperatures encourage deer and elk herds to gather here, finding ample food and cover among the pinyon-juniper hills. Year-round, one may see coyote, cougar, porcupine, cottontail rabbits, all kinds of raptors, blue grouse, snakes and lizards.



But, wait, not all is as it should be on this Road Trip to Dry Creek. The BLM is aggressively treating tamarisk and other invasive plants, such as Russian knapweed and cheatgrass, in an effort to preserve all-important native habitats. Also, “Rock crawlers” (technical 4x4 vehicles) from across the country travel to the Dry Creek Area, because word-of-mouth has spread of the wide-open opportunities that await them here. As a result, BLM staff has discovered irreversible damage to cultural and natural resources from the creation of unauthorized routes, and has temporarily closed those routes until the damage can be assessed.

As the nearby communities of Delta, Olathe and Montrose continue to grow, urban interface issues are on the rise. Last year, volunteers assisted BLM in gathering and disposing of about 150 tires dumped near the Coyote Cutoff. More residents and an increase in visitors from afar lead to resource impacts that must be mitigated.



To this end, the BLM Uncompahgre Field Office recently initiated a Travel Management Plan that proposes a transportation system of designated roads and trails for all modes of travel in the Dry Creek Area. Working closely with the USDA Forest Service, BLM is also addressing commercial, competitive, special area, and organized group activity and event uses, as well as Special Recreation Permits. Why? The BLM wants to preserve the unique character and setting of surrounding public lands, not only for those who call this corner of Colorado home, but also for those choosing to come here and play—the BLM wants it to look and feel the same—maybe even better, whether it be five years from now or 50. So, as you travel the state and find your special spot, remember that it's your privilege as an American to enjoy your public lands and respect these areas. Enjoy them, but help preserve them for others who may follow. Happy travels!