

# Dominguez-Escalante NCA & Dominguez Canyon Wilderness

NCA's and wilderness areas are part of the BLM's National Conservation Lands, a unique network of special places that serve as scenic showcases for the conservation, protection and restoration pieces of the BLM's multiple use mission. 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.

For up-to-date information on driving directions, trails and routes, call or visit:

BLM Grand Junction Field Office  
2815 H Road  
Grand Junction, CO 81506  
Phone: 970-244-3000  
Fax: 970-244-3083  
Office Hours: 7:30am - 4:30pm M-F

BLM Uncompahgre Field Office  
2465 S. Townsend Ave  
Montrose, CO 81401  
Phone: (970) 240-5300  
TDD: (970) 240-5366  
Fax: (970) 240-5367  
Office Hours: 8:00 am - 4:30 pm

or

<http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca.html>



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## Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area & Dominguez Canyon Wilderness



Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area 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 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 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



BLM Photo by Jeremy Matlock

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.

### 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.

The BLM is developing a resource management plan for the NCA and Wilderness. The finished plan will provide long-term management of the special resources and uses in the area.

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.*



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### 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 and Nine Mile Hill are popular sites for motorized recreationists and mountain bikers. **Note:** Mountain bikes or high-clearance vehicles are required on the Tabeguache Trail (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](http://www.usgs.gov)) and weather before your boat trip.

River Access Points:

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

\* outside the NCA Boundary

### 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.



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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.

### 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, use a portable toilet system and pack out the 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.

### 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.

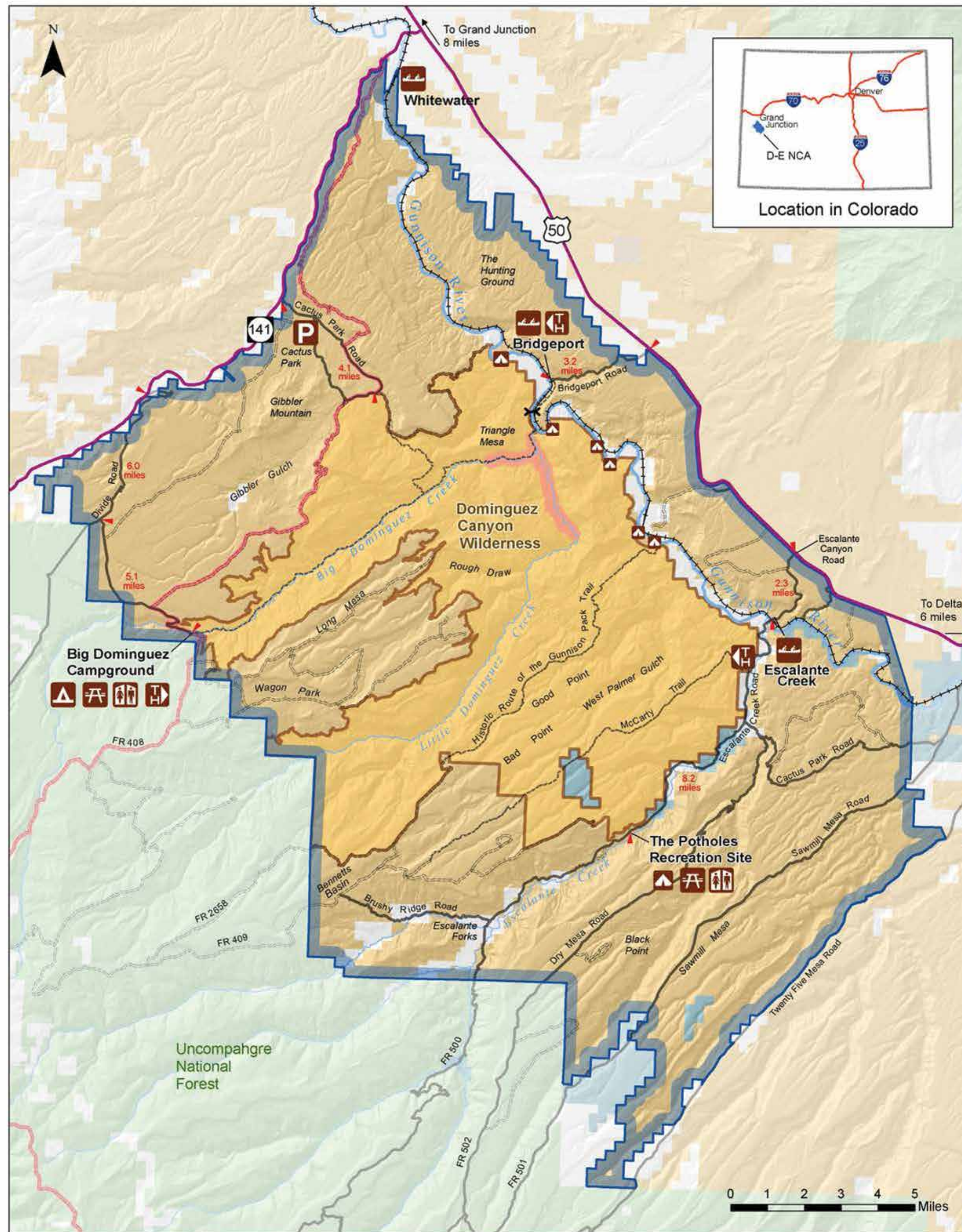
### Leave What You Find

Dominguez-Escalante NCA has a rich cultural history that archaeologists are still studying. Paleontologists have also uncovered scientifically important 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.*



Photo © Jerry Simtz



### Legend

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area | BLM                          |
| Dominguez Canyon Wilderness                    | State Wildlife Area          |
|  | National Forest              |
|  | National Park or Monument    |
|  | Private Land                 |
|  | Area Limited to Day Use Only |
| Primitive Campsite                             | Parking Area                 |
| Campground                                     | Trailhead                    |
| Picnic Area                                    | Boat Launch                  |
| Restroom                                       | Foot Bridge                  |
| State or US Highways                           | Trail                        |
| Maintained Road                                | Tabeguache Trail             |
| Primitive Road                                 | Railroad                     |

**Note:** This map does not show many miles of existing routes. Travel is legal on existing routes, until final route designations are made through the Resource Management Planning Process. Travel Management maps showing existing routes are available through the Dominguez-Escalante NCA website.

### 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.
- Big and Little Dominguez Canyons are managed as Day-use Only areas (see map).

Please Respect All Restrictions and Practice Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics

