

Welcome to the Arkansas Headwaters, one of the nation's premier recreation areas and host to the most commercially rafted river in the world. Stretching 150 miles along the Arkansas River, AHRA offers abundant and outstanding opportunities for angling, rafting, kayaking, picnicking, hiking, horseback riding, camping, OHV travel, mountain biking and sightseeing among deep canyons, broad valleys and towering mountain peaks.

The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area began as a landmark cooperative effort between the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Colorado State Parks. Today, the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the US Forest Service have joined State Parks and the BLM in this management venture. Through this partnership, the agencies provide visitors with outstanding recreation opportunities and care for the nationally significant natural resources of the Arkansas River Valley.

The Arkansas River begins its 1,400-mile journey to the Mississippi among the loftiest peaks in the Rockies, including 14,433-foot Mt. Elbert, the highest mountain in Colorado. In 150 miles, the river tumbles 4,650 vertical feet through open valleys, boulder-strewn canyons and the depths of the Royal Gorge.

Evidence of the first humans in the Arkansas River Valley dates to at least 10,000 years ago. Attracted to the water, wildlife and climate of the area, these prehistoric people most likely used the valley to travel between the mountains and the plains. Later, the Apaches, Utes, Arapahoes, Cheyennes and Kiowas followed many of these same migration routes.

In 1706, the Spaniard Juan de Ulibarri explored the region, followed a century

later by Zebulon Pike. Trappers and traders explored and lived in relative solitude within the valley until 1859 when gold was discovered and miners poured into the area.

Leadville's silver boom in the late 1870s led to a race between the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad and the Santa Fe Railroad for the lucrative Arkansas River Valley railroad route. The Denver and Rio Grande won, and to this day the rails follow this same route along the river.

## CAMPING

The Arkansas Headwaters features six campgrounds with a total of 101 campsites, 88 of which are reservable with advance reservations. The campgrounds are located at Five Points, Vallie Bridge, Rincon, Hecla Junction, Ruby Mountain, and Railroad Bridge. Most sites are located near the river and some are accessible to the physically challenged. Campgrounds do not have potable water, electricity or trash services. Please take trash with you when you leave. Bring firewood with you, wood gathering is not allowed. Please camp only in designated or numbered sites and display your camping permit in the marker provided at your campsite. A daily park pass as well as a camping permit are required for each day.

Electricity or trash services. Please take trash with you when you leave. Bring firewood with you, wood gathering is not allowed. Please camp only in designated or numbered sites and display your camping permit in the marker provided at your campsite. A daily park pass as well as a camping permit are required for each day.

## PICNICKING

Picnicking is permitted throughout the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area except in designated campsites. There are tables and grills available at selected developed sites or one can enjoy an impromptu picnic near the river. Picnic areas do not have potable water or trash services. Please take trash with you when you leave. Please park in designated parking areas. A daily park pass is required to picnic in fee sites.



Courtesy, Colorado Historical Society, Royal Gorge Arkansas River.

## SAFETY

Do not underestimate the power of the Arkansas River - enjoy it safely. Follow these tips for an enjoyable and safe experience:

- Water from the river and streams may look clear and clean but that does not mean it is safe to drink. Bring your own drinking water.
- Even in calm water sections, the river has powerful currents and it is very cold.
- Always wear a life jacket when boating.
- Closely supervise children near the river.
- The river's side canyons are subject to flash flooding. Avoid camping inside canyons, even those that seem very dry. If you anticipate a flash flood hazard, climb high to safety.
- On the highway, be alert for other vehicles slowing and turning into pull-outs and recreation sites located along the river.

## PASSES, PERMITS, FEES

Fee sites within the recreation area have improvements and services, and either a daily or annual Colorado State Parks pass is required to use them. Developed campsites require an additional fee for a camping permit. All fees collected are returned to the area for its operation, maintenance and improvement.

Daily park passes and camping permits can be purchased at self-service dispensers at fee sites or at the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area Visitor Center in Salida.

Annual passes allowing unlimited visits to all Colorado State Parks and Division of Wildlife licenses are also available at the Visitor Center. Colorado residents 64 years of age or older qualify for a discounted Aspen Leaf Pass.

Several other state, federal and local agencies manage a variety of recreation sites in the Arkansas Valley. Please note and abide by the requirements for use of these areas.

The upper Arkansas River Valley is a treasure trove of geology, history, wildlife, scenery and just plain good times. Whether you want to explore a ghost town, run a rapid, hook a trout, watch a bighorn sheep or stare into the depths of the Royal Gorge, chances for adventure are all around you. Below, you will find a community-by-community tour of the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area, featuring both river access sites and campgrounds. Please enjoy your visit.

## LEADVILLE TO BUENA VISTA

### RIVER ACCESS SITES

- Hayden Meadows (Closed to commercial boaters.)
- Hayden Ranch (Closed to commercial boaters.)
- Arkansas River Ranch (Closed to commercial boaters.)
- Kobe (Closed to commercial boaters.)
- Granite
- Clear Creek
- Stone Cabin
- Numbers Site
- Rapid #4
- Railroad Bridge
- Buena Vista Boat Ramp (Managed by Buena Vista.)

### CAMPGROUNDS

- Railroad Bridge

The river below Leadville formed when ancient glacial dams broke, scattering huge boulders across the river bottom. At first, this upper stretch flows fairly quietly between banks that are sometimes open and sometimes forested with Douglas fir and Englemann spruce. Below Granite, the river changes dramatically as it flows into a narrow canyon that is home to Pine Creek rapids (Class V-VI). Below Pine Creek, the Arkansas offers boaters technically challenging (Class III-V) water to Buena Vista.

## BUENA VISTA TO SALIDA

### RIVER ACCESS SITES

- Buena Vista Boat Ramp (Managed by Buena Vista.)
- Fisherman's Bridge
- Ruby Mountain
- Hecla Junction
- Stone Bridge
- Big Bend
- Salida Boat Ramp (Managed by Salida.)

### CAMPGROUNDS

- Ruby Mountain
- Hecla Junction

The Buena Vista River Park (kayak play-hole) is located at the Buena Vista boat ramp. Beyond the river park, this stretch's outstanding feature is Browns

Canyon, a brown granite gorge of white-water rapids. The busiest stretch of river, Browns is a wild ride at high water, although at any water level it is a beautiful and challenging river trip. Ruby Mountain, the canyon's northern gateway, provides access to the 6,660-acre Browns Canyon Wilderness Study Area. Here, visitors can hike, backpack, camp, fish and view wildlife.

Below Browns Canyon, the valley widens and the river calms though spectacular views remain. This stretch, called Big Bend, offers prime trout fishing, and numerous Colorado Division of Wildlife easements provide anglers with river access on private land.

## SALIDA TO VALLIE BRIDGE

### RIVER ACCESS SITES

- Salida Boat Ramp (Managed by Salida.)
- Salida East
- Rincon
- Vallie Bridge

### CAMPGROUNDS

- Rincon
- Vallie Bridge (Boat in/Walk in)

The Salida Whitewater Park (kayak play-hole/slalom course) is located at the Salida Boat Ramp. Just below Salida, the river flows into Bighorn Sheep Canyon, a granite canyon dotted with stands of pinon pine, juniper and oak brush. Anglers especially enjoy this segment - it offers deep pools, rock banks and gravel bars. In addition to public land access along the river, Division of Wildlife fishing easements also provide river access. Boaters will find Class II-IV rapids in this segment.

## VALLIE BRIDGE TO PARKDALE

### RIVER ACCESS SITES

- Vallie Bridge
- Canyon Trading Post
- Lone Pine
- Texas Creek
- Pinnacle Rock
- Salt Lick
- Spikebuck
- Parkdale

### CAMPGROUNDS

- Vallie Bridge (Boat in/Walk in)
- Five Points

The section between Vallie Bridge and Parkdale is teeming with wildlife. Herds of bighorn sheep and deer silently drink from the river banks while an abundance of birds soar overhead. This section is ideal for rafting and fishing alike, as well as for other recreational activities such as picnicking along the banks of the river. The rapids in this section range from Class II-V, and this diversity makes for a very popular stretch of river.

## PARKDALE TO CAÑON CITY

### RIVER ACCESS SITES

- Parkdale
- River Station (Managed by Cañon City/Closed to private boaters.)
- Centennial Park (Managed by Cañon City/Closed to commercial boaters.)

Parkdale Recreation Site provides public access before the river enters the Royal Gorge. From this peaceful spot, the river plunges into the Royal Gorge, the Arkansas River's most famous achievement. Over millions of years, the river carved through the hard rock of the Royal Gorge Plateau, forming the 1,000-foot walls of the gorge.

Boaters who go to view the gorge from the bottom up should take note: within the gorge, the river gives you a wild ride, with Class IV-V (extremely difficult) rapids. In addition, scouting and portaging this section of the river is very difficult.

## CAÑON CITY TO LAKE PUEBLO STATE PARK

### RIVER ACCESS SITES

- River Station (Managed by Cañon City/Closed to private boaters.)
- Centennial Park (Managed by Cañon City/Closed to commercial boaters.)
- Florence River Park (Managed by Florence.)
- Blue Heron
- Lake Pueblo State Park

### CAMPGROUNDS

- Lake Pueblo State Park

Below Cañon City, the Arkansas changes into a quiet, meandering great plains river with Class I-II water. Cottonwood, willow and water-loving plants along its banks create a "riparian zone" that is home to an abundance of wildlife. Therefore, this stretch of river offers fantastic wildlife viewing and great fishing.

The slower pace of the river also makes for excellent canoeing; however, caution and skill are still necessary to avoid low-head dams and overhanging/fallen trees. Most of the river here is bordered by private land. Please respect landowners and do not trespass.

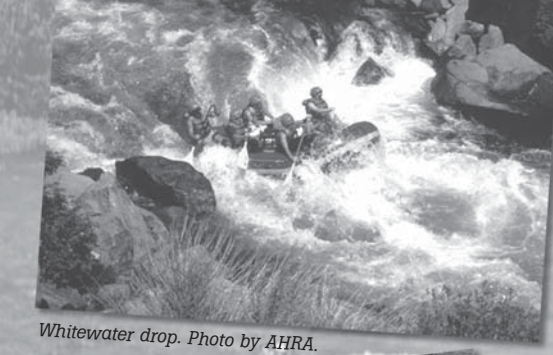
The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area ends at Lake Pueblo State Park.



Photos by the Numbers.



Photo by AHRA.



Whitewater drop. Photo by AHRA.

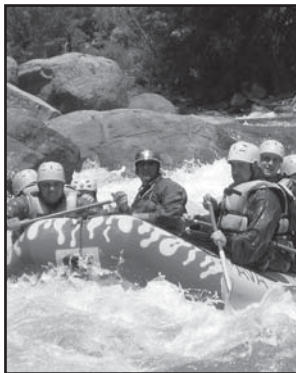


Rock climbing. Photo by Penny Meierdirk.

## SUCCESS STORY

Located within a three-hour drive of Colorado Springs, Denver and other Front Range cities, the Upper Arkansas River Valley is the "backyard" of millions of Colorado residents. International and national recognition of the area's outstanding recreation opportunities and resources draws visitors here from across the U.S. and around the world.

The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area is managed through a unique, cooperative partnership of Colorado State Parks, the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Division of Wildlife and the US Forest Service. State Parks and BLM provide the primary management for the intensive recreation use as well as the area's many resources. The partners have acquired important river access for the public and developed recreational facilities such as campgrounds, picnic areas, boat ramps, wildlife viewing areas, fishing access sites and OHV trails. The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area, National Forest Land, BLM Public Land, Bureau of Reclamation projects and State Wildlife Areas together provide many of the outstanding resources and recreational opportunities found in the upper Arkansas Valley. State and federal agencies, local governments, private organizations and individuals responsible for managing the land and resources of the upper Arkansas Valley work together in a partnership. The goal: to balance increasing recreation use and other demands with resource protection - for what would the upper Arkansas Valley be without water, wildlife and wilderness?



For new and current information on all Colorado State Parks visit us online at [www.parks.state.co.us](http://www.parks.state.co.us).



**Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area**  
307 W. Sackett Avenue  
Salida, CO 81201  
(719) 539-7289  
E-mail: [ahra@state.co.us](mailto:ahra@state.co.us)  
Visit us online at [www.parks.state.co.us](http://www.parks.state.co.us)  
Visit Bureau of Land Management at [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov)

CSP-AHRA-8.5M-5/08



## ARKANSAS HEADWATERS RECREATION AREA

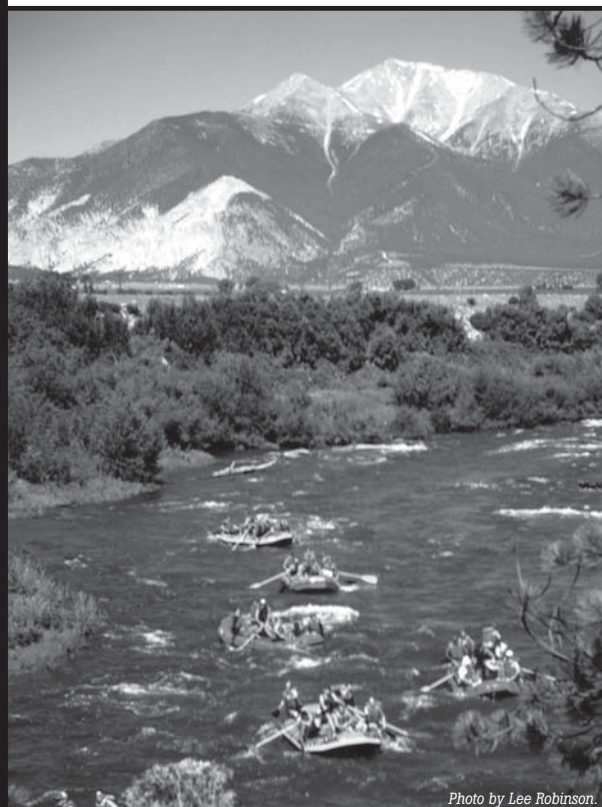


Photo by Lee Robinson.



Photo by the Numbers.

Visit all your Colorado State Parks at [www.parks.state.co.us](http://www.parks.state.co.us)

## THE FINER POINTS OF ENJOYING YOUR VISIT TO THE ARKANSAS HEADWATERS RECREATION AREA.

### FISHING

Eddies, ripples, deep pools ... the Arkansas offers excellent angling along its entire length. In the spring and fall, the brown trout fishing is exceptional. Both browns and rainbows average 10 to 12 inches with the possibility of an occasional trophy catch. The Arkansas River has a self-sustaining brown trout population and is recognized as Colorado's premier brown trout fishery.

Public fishing access is available on public lands and on fishing easements crossing private lands. Signs mark all public fishing access points along the river. Refer to the map in this brochure for more information about fishing easements, AHRA recreation sites and state wildlife areas.

Regulations vary along the river, so please be certain you know the rules that apply to the areas you will be fishing. Fishing regulations and licenses are available at Colorado Division of Wildlife offices and at numerous sporting goods stores throughout the area.

Boaters and anglers share the river, with some sections of the river being more heavily boated than others. Most whitewater boating takes place from mid-morning to mid-afternoon and therefore the best fishing is typically early and late in the day. High water in the late spring and early to mid summer brings the most intense boating use, while fishing use peaks both before and after high water.

### WILDLIFE VIEWING

As the Arkansas River flows from the alpine highlands to the prairie lowlands, it attracts and sustains a variety of wildlife species. Many animals, such as mule deer, pronghorn antelope and bighorn sheep live year round in the valley. Other species, such as elk, or even moose are found in the valley. Elusive bobcats and mountain lions are year-round residents, but are seen only occasionally. Many different species of birds also inhabit and migrate through the valley - including the peregrine falcon and bald eagles.

Watch for Colorado's state mammal, the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, on the rocky slopes along the river in Bighorn Sheep Canyon from U.S. Highway 50 and in Browns Canyon. Mid-morning and late afternoon are prime times for bighorn sheep viewing. When you see wildlife - keep voices down, give the animals plenty of space and allow them to go about their business undisturbed.

To find out more about the wildlife of the Arkansas Valley, stop by the Watchable Wildlife exhibits located at Blue Heron, Five Points, Pinnacle Rock, Lone Pine, Canyon Trading Post, Fisherman's Bridge, Collegiate Peaks, Hayden Meadows and Crystal Lakes recreation sites.

Bighorn sheep.

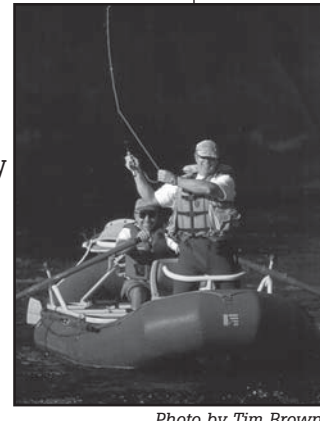


Photo by Tun Brown.

### WHITewater BOATING

The Arkansas is one of the world's most popular whitewater boating rivers for kayaking and rafting - with good reason. Clear water, dramatic scenery and rapids rated from beginner to expert lure boaters from around the world.

Within the recreation area, the river changes character several times as it travels through the varied geologic features, making for a variety of boating experiences. With native flows peaking in early June, and the voluntary flow program providing supplemental water during the summer months, the Arkansas has an extended boating season, reaching well into July and August.

Private Boaters

The Arkansas can present tremendous challenges to both novice and experienced boaters. Be certain to get specific information about the section of river you are interested in. Consult others who have boated there, know your abilities - and carry and use safety equipment. All white-water boats (canoes, kayaks and rafts) must have the owner's name and current address written legibly and clearly visible somewhere on the craft.

Commercial Outfitters

Many commercial boating companies operate within the recreation area and offer visitors the chance to experience the "wet side" of the river with experienced guides. AHRA encourages you to explore the Arkansas River first hand, be it a wet and wild ride through Class III+ rapids, a relaxing float trip through calm water or a walk and wade or float fishing trip in world-class trout waters.

### RIVER ETHICS

With such spectacular surroundings and unlimited recreational opportunities, the Arkansas River draws hundreds of thousands of visitors to the recreation area.

Please treat the AHRA, your fellow visitors and local residents with courtesy. Follow these basic rules:

- Respect the rights and property of landowners and residents - do not trespass on private land and keep noise down near homes.
- Boaters, if possible, move to the other side of the river, away from anglers and avoid playing in fishing holes.
- Dispose of trash and waste properly. If you pack it in, please pack it out. Trash pickup costs time and money that could be much better spent on other efforts.
- Keep pets on a leash no longer than six feet.
- Fires must be built within a permanent constructed fire grate or a portable fire container elevated off the ground with a two inch+ rigid side (as required by regulation). Tend fires constantly and extinguish them when no longer needed.
- All campers camping outside of established campgrounds, and all commercial boating trips must provide and use a portable toilet device capable of carrying human waste out of the AHRA (as required by regulation).
- Keep vehicles on existing roads and parking areas, unless otherwise posted.
- Follow specific regulations posted at individual locations.

Photos by the Numbers.



# Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area

## Outdoor Adventures in the Upper Arkansas River Valley

Welcome to the Upper Arkansas River Valley and its famous 14'ers, whitewater, wilderness, and wildlife. The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area offers many fun and exciting activities. Please:

- know your skill level and physical condition
- be aware of the risks involved in an activity
- be familiar with safety practices
- equip yourself properly

### Visitor Etiquette

Hundreds of thousands of visitors boat on the river every year, and close to a million people enjoy the recreation area. Courtesy and respect for other users will make everyone's experience more enjoyable. You can minimize your impact and help us protect this valuable resource by observing the following guidelines. Please:

- respect private property and don't trespass
- keep noise down
- if you are boating, travel on the opposite side of the river from anglers, and avoid fishing holes
- learn and practice Leave No Trace back-country ethics, including pack it in/pack it out
- use existing restroom facilities, or a portable toilet (groover), required by regulation
- stop only at established, well-used sites and avoid trampling streamside vegetation
- keep pets on a leash no longer than six feet at all times, required by regulation
- build fires only in grills and fire pans, required by regulation

### Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area Visitor Center

- Annual passes, registrations, maps and guides are available at the AHRA Visitor Center.
- The AHRA Visitor Center is located on the corner of G and Sackett streets in downtown Salida, one block north of Highway 291.

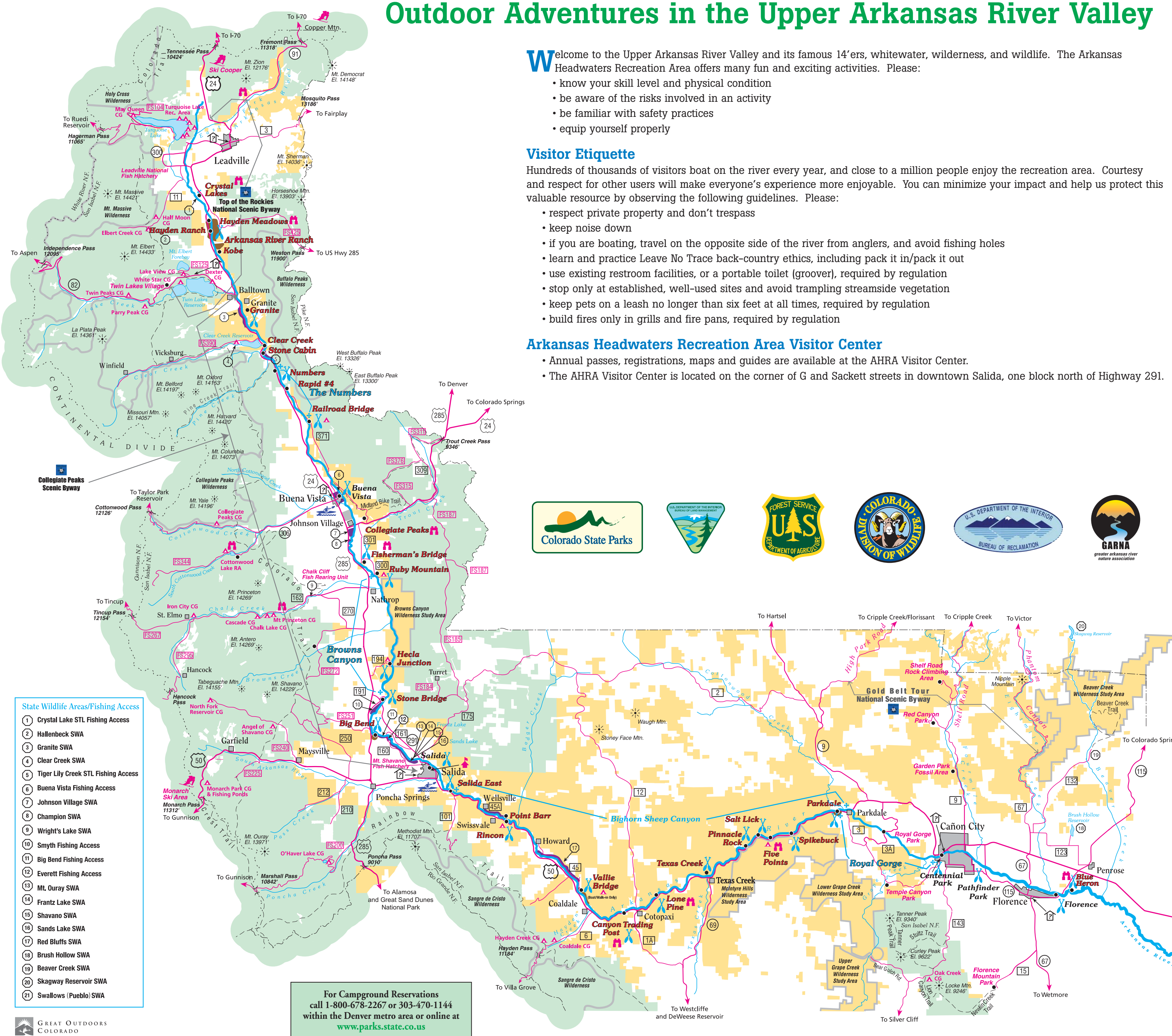
**Legend**

- Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (Jointly managed by State Parks and the Bureau of Land Management)
- AHRM Headquarters
- AHRM Recreation Site (See chart for activities available at each site.)
- Boat Ramp/Slide Site (See chart for activities available at each site.)
- Fishing easements crossing private lands. Look for signs marking easements
- Kayak Play Park
- Public Campground
- Recreation Site
- Visitor Information
- Wildlife Viewing Area

---

- Private/State Lands (No public access)
- Colorado State Park Lands
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Public Land
- BLM Wilderness Study Area
- US Forest Service Land
- US Forest Service Wilderness Area
- Communities
- US Highway and Interstate
- Paved Road
- Dirt Road
- Continental Divide
- Trail

1" = 5 miles



- State Wildlife Areas/Fishing Access**
- 1 Crystal Lake STL Fishing Access
  - 2 Hallenbeck SWA
  - 3 Granite SWA
  - 4 Clear Creek SWA
  - 5 Tiger Lily Creek STL Fishing Access
  - 6 Buena Vista Fishing Access
  - 7 Johnson Village SWA
  - 8 Champion SWA
  - 9 Wright's Lake SWA
  - 10 Smyth Fishing Access
  - 11 Big Bend Fishing Access
  - 12 Everitt Fishing Access
  - 13 Mt. Ouray SWA
  - 14 Frantz Lake SWA
  - 15 Shavano SWA
  - 16 Sands Lake SWA
  - 17 Red Bluffs SWA
  - 18 Brush Hollow SWA
  - 19 Beaver Creek SWA
  - 20 Skagway Reservoir SWA
  - 21 Swallows (Pueblo) SWA

For Campground Reservations  
call 1-800-678-2267 or 303-470-1144  
within the Denver metro area or online at  
[www.parks.state.co.us](http://www.parks.state.co.us)

GREAT OUTDOORS  
COLORADO  
Funded in part through Great Outdoors Colorado with Colorado Lottery proceeds.

Printed with soy inks on recycled paper.  
30% POST CONSUMER WASTE



**Recreation Site Facilities**

	AHRM Managed	Boat Access	Boat Ramp/Bike	Camping	Changing Facilities	Fishing Access	Hiking	Motor/Mtn. Bike	Only	Parking	Picnic Tables/Grills	Restrooms	Scenic Overlook	Special Needs Fishing Access	Watchable Wildlife
Arkansas River Ranch															
Big Bend															
Blue Heron															
Buena Vista															
Canyon Trading Post															
Centennial Park															
Clear Creek															
Collegiate Peaks															
Crystal Lakes															
Fisherman's Bridge															
Five Points															
Florence															
Granite															
Hayden Meadows															
Hayden Ranch															
Hecla Junction															
Kobe															
Lone Pine															
Numbers															
Parkdale															
Pathfinder Park															
Pinnacle Rock															
Point Barr															
Railroad Bridge															
Rapid #4															
Rincon															
Ruby Mountain															
Salida															
Salida East															
Salt Lick															
Spikebuck															
Stone Bridge															
Stone Cabin															
Texas Creek															
Vallie Bridge															

**PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED ACCESS**

The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area has fully accessible restroom facilities at each developed campground and each campground has at least one fully-accessible campsite. Selected river access sites also have fully accessible restroom facilities, complete with accessible parking spots. Please call 719-539-7289 or visit [www.parks.state.co.us](http://www.parks.state.co.us) for more information.

