

River Permit Info and Links for January 2026 Planning and Permit Party

The following includes info for lottery permitted rivers that club members have paddled in the past as well as a brief step by step process and the club etiquette for participation as part of a canoe club group. The deadline for most (not all) lottery applications is January 31. Permit notifications for most rivers (not all) is mid-Feb.

Canoe Club Permit Lottery Etiquette:

Joining with others in a lottery "assault" carries both rights and obligations which you should understand. Each person who hopes to go on any particular trip should enter the lottery for that trip. All family members who hope to go on the trip should enter the lottery individually. For those of us who belong to multiple clubs, we should join a permit lottery group with only one club for each river we are interested in.

For example, someone who is a member of both Poudre Paddlers and the Canoe Club may decide to join with the Canoe Club group attempting to get a permit for the Smith River, and join with the Poudre Paddlers group attempting to get a Desolation Grey permit. They would not join groups from both clubs for the same river. This goes for those who are members of other clubs or part of a private group of friends.

If you are lucky enough to catch a permit, you should first look to extend trip invitations to the others in the club with whom you submitted in the lottery for that river. That's why it's important to keep track of who's applying. But we all understand that many of our paddlers have been previously invited on other trips (both club and non-club) and that this creates an additional and sometimes conflicting etiquette to invite those generous trip leaders on your trip if you get a permit. Karma rules here as it does in much of life.

Ultimately, who and how many boaters go on any of our club trips is up to the Trip Coordinator. On lottery permit trips, final decisions belong to the permit holder, just as they do for any Trip Coordinator. Decisions regarding skills, safety, desired number of boaters, and personalities can always come into play.

Here is a brief step by step on the process

1. Research rivers to assess your interest and to see if you possess the required skills and experience. Each river listed below has a link where you can find info. Other resources are also listed below.
2. Add your name to rivers of interest on the Interest Survey when it becomes available January 1, 2026 (club members will receive a link to the Survey on Jan. 1).
3. Come to the Permit and Planning Party January 10, 2026 (or attend virtually). There will be a chance to talk to others interested in the same river. After the party, everyone will be able to see who else expressed similar interests and can initiate communication with each other to finalize groups, desired dates and strategies for obtaining a permit. .
4. **Apply to the lottery by Jan 31!** (see below for rivers with different deadlines.) Each person who wants to go on a canoe club trip submits a lottery application for each river of interest, selecting their desired dates—using whatever strategy your group has decided on and records their submission dates on the shared Google doc..

*****Permits are NOT transferable. If you receive a permit, you must be able to make the trip or the trip won't go. (Some rivers may allow a back up person. Most do not.)*****

5. Watch for notifications of permits granted. Announcement dates are listed below for each river. Most announcements are mid-Feb.
6. Celebrate if someone receives a permit! Plan your Trip!
7. OR plan attempts for cancellations. Info on pursuing cancellations can be found through the links listed below for each river.

Here are some great resources for river trip information:

—Trip reports on our RMCC website is a great resource for learning more about trips that might interest you.

- a. Go to the club website, <https://rockymountaincanoecub.net/>
- b. Click on the “Posts” tab in the menu
- c. Select “Trip Reports”. You’ll be able to scroll through past trip reports and get a sense of a variety of trips. You can also search trip reports for information on a specific trip.

—American Whitewater website. They have an excellent river search function. You can search by State and Class and perhaps find something new to run.

<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Search/view/>

—Additionally, one of our “sister clubs” Poudre Paddlers, has excellent, and extensive river descriptions which they welcome us to peruse.

<https://www.poudrepaddlers.org/descriptions-and-maps.html>

Colorado

****Please note that our intention is to be as accurate as possible with the river info below, that we have checked. But please use the links provided to double check the official word!****

Yampa and Green Rivers in Dinosaur National Monument

Lodore: Class III-IV 44 miles

Yampa: Class II-III(IV) 71 miles

Information Website: <https://www.nps.gov/dino/planyourvisit/non-commercial-river-trips.htm>

High Use Season: May 10 – Sept 11 (Green); May 11 – July 11 (Yampa)

Low Use Season reservations: Beginning Mar 6 (also one-day and unclaimed High Use trips)

High Use Season Lottery Dates: December 1 - January 31st

Permit Acceptance Date: Mar 1

Lottery website: <https://www.recreation.gov/permits/250014>

Lottery Notification Date: February 12th (estimated)

Lottery fee: \$15.

Permit fee (if successful in the lottery): \$185 – due on Mar 1 2024, 10 pm (MT)

Flows: 500 cfs is considered minimum by many canoeists, but it has been run lower. Use your own judgment.

Historical average flow for Yampa at end of July is 500 cfs

Flow gauge:

Lodore: <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?09234500>

Yampa: <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?09260050>

Difficulty: Class I – III (or IV at some water levels)

Over-length Trip Fee \$35.00. During the High-use season, the normal trip length for river trips is five days on the Yampa River and four days on the Green River. When applying for a permit, you may apply for an additional day on your trip.

Colorado River – Ruby Horsethief (aka Loma to Westwater)

Class I-II 25 river miles

Not a lottery but an on-line reservation system. Reservations can be made 60 days before the launch date. You reserve campsites, not launch dates.

Information Website:

<https://www.blm.gov/visit/ruby-horsethief-canyon-permits#:~:text=The%20Ruby%2DHorsethief%20section%20of%20offering%20both%20solitude%20and%20exploration.>

High Use Season: April 1 – Oct 31 [Camping fees are charged during this period.]

Reservations website: <https://www.recreation.gov/permits/74466>

Note: Reservations are for campsites and they're highly competitive for late spring, summer, and early fall Saturdays. Reservations can be made 60 days before the launch date. Between May and Nov, reservations can be made after 8am Mountain time.

Reservation costs: \$6 plus the cost of the campsite (\$20 - \$100/night depending on group size. 25 heartbeats =group max. 2 dogs allowed. 1-5 heartbeats=\$20/nite; 6-14=\$50/nite; 15-25=\$100/nite)

Note: reservations are required year round For Ruby Horsethief trips, but campsites are free outside of the High Use Season

Flows: Between 2000 – 4000 cfs, beginning canoe skills. Between 5000 and 10000cfs, advanced canoeing skill required.

Flow gauge:

<https://waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/09163500/#parameterCode=00060&period=P7D&showMedian=false>

Montana

****Again, please note that our intention is to be as accurate as possible with the river info below. Please use the links provided to double check the official word! Montana has made several changes in the past couple of years, particularly to significantly reduce permits available for out of state boaters.****

Smith River – Camp Baker to Eden Bridge

Class I-II - 60 river miles

Permit required all year. High season May 15 – July 15 (max 4 nights on river. max group=15; no dogs.

Shoulder Season (non lottery): September - October; self registration at put-in. Number of days not limited.

Lottery Permits available for trips April 1 - August 15.

Lottery application dates: January 1, 2026 through February 15, 2026

Note 1: Applicants will have only one launch date choice, instead of three choices.

Note 2: The number of permits available for nonresidents may not exceed 10 percent of the available permits. (This new law was passed as part of House Bill 846 in the 2023 Legislative Session.)

Lottery application fee: \$15 *see website for additional "super permit" info)

Permit fee: \$60 for non-Montana resident adults

Lottery Drawing: February 18, 2026

(note: FWP will notify successful applicants by email. FWP does not notify unsuccessful permit applicants. Lottery results will also be available at myfwp.mt.gov)

Information website: <http://stateparks.mt.gov/smith-river>

Lottery website: same as above

Flows: Montana State Parks says the canoe minimum is 150 cfs. 300-500 is more realistic.

(***A river ranger told us in 2023 that 110 - 120 cfs is reasonable for a canoe but they say 150 cfs to be conservative. Katherine had a great trip Oct. 2023 at 190 cfs. (Paddlers were in kayaks.)

Flow gauge: <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/mt/nwis/uv?06077200>

Contact info:

Phone: 406-454-5861 (March 2-August 15)

Phone: 406-454-5840 (August 16-February 28)

Email: SmithRiver@mt.gov

New Mexico

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Rio Chama, El Vado to Big Eddy

Class I - III - 31 miles

Information Website:

<https://www.blm.gov/programs/recreation/permits-and-passes/lotteries-and-permit-systems/new-mexico/rio-chama-river>

Lottery Website: <https://www.recreation.gov/permits/621743>

Lottery Seasons:

- Early Season: April 15 – July 15 Lottery for Friday launches only. Weekday flows match reservoir inflow, weekend flows may be augmented.
- Release Season: July 16 – Sept 15 Lottery for Friday and Saturday launches only. Weekday flows may be minimal, weekend flows augmented.

Lottery Deadline: Dec 1 - January 31

Lottery Notification: Feb 14

Lottery Acceptance Period: Feb 14 – Mar 15

Early and Release Season Reservations Available 8:00am MST: April 1

Lottery fee: \$6

Permit Fee: \$5/person for BLM, \$5/person for El Vado Ranch launch fee

Flows: Optimum flows 500 – 1000 cfs; minimum 300 cfs (

Flow Gauge:

<https://waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/08285500/#parameterCode=00065&period=P7D&showMedian=false>

Utah

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Green River, Desolation and Grays Canyons (Deso-Gray) Sand Wash to Swazey's Rapid

Class I – III (IV) - 84 miles

Information Website <https://www.blm.gov/programs/recreation/passes-and-permits/lotteries/utah/desolationgray>

Lottery Website: <https://www.recreation.gov/permits/233393>

Lottery Seasons: May 1 – Sept 30 (this appears to be an extension from last year's Sept 15 lottery season end)

Lottery Deadline: January 31, 2026

Lottery Notification: Feb 14, 2026

Lottery Acceptance Period: Feb 14 – Mar 14, 2026

Lottery fee: \$6

Permit Fee: \$40/person

Flows: Optimum flows 500 – 1000 cfs; minimum 300 cfs

Flow Gauge:

<https://waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/09315000/#parameterCode=00065&period=P7D&showMedian=false>

*December 1, dates not in the lottery open up on a first-come, first-served basis to be reserved beginning at 8am MST. (March - April & October - November)

San Juan River, Sand Island to Mexican Hat 26 miles or Mexican Hat to Clay Hills Crossing 58 miles or both

Class I-III

Information Website <https://www.blm.gov/visit/san-juan-river>

Lottery Website: <https://www.recreation.gov/permits/250986>

Lottery Seasons: April 15 – July 15

Lottery Deadline: January 31, 2026

Lottery Notification: Feb 12, 2026

Lottery Acceptance Period: Feb 13 – Mar 14

Lottery fee: \$6

Permit Fee:

- Sand Island to Mexican Hat \$10/person/trip
- Mexican Hat to Clay Hills Crossing \$20/person/trip
- Sand Island to Clay Hills Crossing \$30/person/trip

Flows: Optimum flows 500 – 1000 cfs; minimum 300 cfs

Flow Gauge:

<https://waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/09379500/#parameterCode=00065&period=P7D&showMedian=false>

Statistics (from 2021): https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/uploads/utah_river_sanjuanriver_lotterystatistics.pdf

****Please note a change to BLM's alternate permit holder policy for this location: alternate permit holders may only be added at time of lottery application*

Idaho

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Middle Fork Of The Salmon

Class III-IV 95 miles

Information Website <https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/river-detail/618/main>

Lottery Website: <https://www.recreation.gov/permits/234623>

Lottery Seasons: May 28 – Sept 3

Lottery Deadline: January 31, 2026

Lottery Notification: Feb 14, 2026

Canceled Permits Available: Mar 16

Lottery fee: \$6

Permit Fee: \$4/person/Day

Flows: Optimum flows 700 – 10,000 cfs

Flow Gauge: <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?13309220>

Salmon River (Main)

Class III-IV 80 miles

Information Website <https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/river-detail/612/main>

Lottery Website: <https://www.recreation.gov/permits/234622>

Lottery Seasons: June 20 – Sept 7

Lottery Deadline: January 31, 2026

Lottery Notification: Feb 14, 2026

Canceled Permits Available: Mar 16

Lottery fee: \$6

Permit Fee: \$4/person/Day

Flows: Optimum flows 2000 – 30,000 cfs

Flow Gauge: <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?13317000>