



# Desolation/Gray Canyon's Information

BLM Price Field Office, Utah

## General Info

Desolation/Gray Canyons is an 84 mile trip from Sand Wash Ranger Station and Launch Area to Swasey's Boat Ramp and Campground. The canyons offer outstanding scenery, interesting geologic formations, evidence of both prehistoric and historic human activity, and contain over sixty riffles some as challenging as class III/IV whitewater. The average trip length for private boaters is 6 to 7 days.

## Permit Required

Permits are required year-round for commercial and private use of Desolation/Gray Canyons. Permits are limited to two (2) permits a day August 15 – May 14 and six (6) permits a day May 15 – August 14. To obtain a permit please visit <https://www.recreation.gov/permits/233393>. Permit dates from May through September are awarded via lottery, the lottery application period is December 1 – January 31 and is limited to one entry per person. Permit dates from October 1 – April 30 are available on a first come first serve basis starting December 1 the year prior. Permits have a maximum group size of 25 people.

## Sand Wash Ranger Station / Boat Launch Area

Sand Wash has a staffed ranger station, a primitive boat ramp, vault toilets, eight (8) primitive campsites, four (4) of which contain screen cabins that can be rented here

<https://www.recreation.gov/camping/campgrounds/234745>. Trash receptacles and water **are not provided** due to the remoteness of the area.

## Camping

Permittees can opt for 3 – 9 days to experience Desolation/Gray Canyons, camping along the river corridor is on first come first serve basis and limited to the west side of the river from Sand Wash to Coal Creek Rapid. After Coal Creek Rapid permittees may camp on either side of the river. Groups must stay together. Sending a boat from your group out a head to secure a campsite is strictly prohibited and leads to bad karma.

## River Flow

The river typically peaks around 20,000 CFS in late May or early June and recedes throughout the summer and fall to less than 3,000 CFS. Every water level will create its own set of unique challenges for navigating the river corridor. User experience and knowledge determines the difficulty of navigating this river corridor, if you are unfamiliar with this river section consult the on duty ranger for advice and if all else fails when in doubt, scout it out. For current river flows please visit <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/ut/nwis/current/?type=flow> the Green River at Ouray, Utah and the Green River at Green River, UT gauges will give you the flows through Desolation/Gray Canyons. In years of extreme drought flows can be as low as 650 -800 CFS the river corridor is still navigable at these flows and outfitters still run 18' foot boats, although smaller boats, longer trip length and lighter packing are preferred for this extremely low water level.

## Dogs

Dogs are NOT allowed in Desolation/Gray Canyon.



## **Bears**

Desolation/Gray Canyons are home to black bears. Please plan your trip and recreate accordingly by keeping clean campsites, stowing all trash and food on your boat and latching down coolers and dry boxes. Avoid sleeping in clothes that you cooked in or spilled food on and remember a **fed bear is a dead bear**.

## **First Aid Kits**

First Aid Kits are required for every group launching down Desolation / Gray Canyons. First Aid Kits must be applicable to your groups' size and style of trip. (i.e. A group of 5 self-support kayakers wouldn't be required to carry the same first aid kit as a group of 20 rafters) Groups must be prepared to deal with emergencies and care for the sick and injured for an extended period, from several hours up to several days. First aid kit contents should be commensurate with your level of skill and training in First Aid.

## **Personal Floatation Devices**

Personal Flotation Devices (PFD) are required on the Desolation-Gray section of the Green River. Children under 50 pounds must have a PFD that they cannot come out of. Water Ski Jackets are NOT approved for Whitewater Rivers.

Stipulation 7.b. adhere to the Utah Boating Act (title 73, Chapter 18), which includes the wearing of life jackets where required (children ages 12 and under must wear PFD's at all times when boating on the river, and all persons must wear a PFD from Jack Creek Rapid to the take out).

PFDs will be checked at Sand Wash. Labels must be attached and legible. Approved jackets will have some or all of the following wording:

TYPE I, III, V  
U.S. Coastguard Approved  
Approved for paddling, whitewater, kayaking, canoeing  
For all Recreational Use  
Approved for all inland water uses

## **Ice Warning**

The months of December through March Desolation/Gray Canyons may contain dangerous ice conditions. Ice forms across the main channel the Green River and will completely block the river with no surface water showing at all. Eddies and slack water areas are the first to ice over, making it difficult and dangerous to beach at most campsites during these months.

In late winter/early spring the ice begins to break up on both the Green River and its tributaries it then flows down the Green River. Only a few miles below Sand Wash, the river channel becomes shallow and braided, this allows ice to hang up in the braided channels and create ice dams that can be several feet high. Much like a strainer the current flows under and through these obstructions, and the river becomes unnavigable. Ice dam obstructions are common anywhere between Nine Mile Creek and Lighthouse Rock during the transition of winter into spring.



## **Tribal Land**

The East side of the river from Sand Wash to Coal Creek is Ute Tribal Land. As of September 2018, all activities on Ute Tribal Lands are strictly prohibited. Activities prohibited include, but are not limited to: landing water craft, visitation of cultural and historic sites, camping and hiking. Please contact the Ute Tribe Fish & Wildlife Dept. at (435) 722-5511 if you have questions.

## **Shuttle Information**

Groups who plan on running their own shuttle can expect a one way drive time from Sand Wash to the take-out at Swasey's Beach through Nine Mile Canyon is 4.5 to 5 hours, assuming there are good road and weather conditions. Three hours of the trip are on dirt roads with many twists and blind curves. Be safe, take your time. Driving US Highway 40, going through Duchesne and Myton takes slightly longer, but with only an hour or so of dirt road. In wet conditions, this is the preferred route. Round Trip groups should expect 10 – 12 hours for a round trip shuttle. Companies that currently provide shuttle services for Desolation/Gray Canyons are listed on the BLM website.

## **Motors on the River**

Motor boat registration is required in all fifty states. Motors may only be used on Desolation/Gray canyons if the motor boat is registered in the state the owner resides in. Proof of current registration must be presented at the time of launch. Motors without current registration cannot be taken down the river. There are no facilities to store motors at Sand Wash, so boaters with unregistered motor boats must store their motors in their personal vehicles or arrange for them to be shuttled to the takeout. Motorized use in Desolation/Gray canyons is limited to downstream travel only at a slow, wakeless speed.

## **Emergency Services**

In an emergency call 911, Carbon County Dispatch (435)637-0890 or Emery County Dispatch (435)381-2111.

## **Additional Information**

There are two maps/guide books for Desolation/Gray Canyons. The first is made by RiverMaps and is called "*Guide to the Green River in Desolation and Gray Canyons*" by Duwain Whitis and Barbara Vinson. The second map is made by Belknap and is called "*Belknap's Waterproof Desolation Canyon River Guide*".