

The West Elk Wilderness encompasses more than 176,000 acres in the Gunnison National Forest. Elevations within the Wilderness range from 7,000 to over 13,000 feet. Over 200 miles of constructed trails are available for both boot and horse travel through sometimes rugged terrain. Weather for the area can vary greatly; but generally, you can expect cool mountain climate with scattered rain showers throughout the summer months. Normally, the West Elk Area is snow free from mid-July to September, but conditions depend on the elevation and amount of snowfall each winter. Lower elevations from around 7,000 to 8,500 feet may become snow free by early June, but some creek and river water levels tend to be high. The annual precipitation varies from 25 inches to 40 inches. Some points of interest in the West Elks are the Castles, West Elk Peak, Sheep Lake, North/Middle/South Baldy Mountain, West and East Beckwith Mountains. Wildlife includes elk, mule deer, black bear, bobcat, mountain lion, coyote, snowshoe hares, Golden Eagle and other small species. Streams are inhabited by native cutthroat, rainbow, brook and brown trout. Forest maps and trail information is available at the Forest Service offices in Delta, Paonia and Gunnison. Please observe Wilderness guidelines when you visit and record trips at trailhead registers.

Wilderness Guidelines

1. Maximum party size is 25 heart beat, this is a maximum of 15 people and includes livestock and pets. Larger groups tend to do significant damage to trails and campsites.
2. Locate campsites, campfires and recreational stock at least 100 feet from lakes, streams and trails. Vegetation and soils adjacent to lakes and streams are sensitive to disturbance. Camping away from trails adds to a visitor's sense of solitude.
3. All dogs, except for working stock dogs, guide dogs or dogs used for legal hunting, must be restrained on a leash and/or under direct verbal control of the dogs' owner or handler at all times. Pets are not a natural part of the wilderness and their presence can disrupt wildlife.

4. No motorized vehicles, motorized equipment, motorboats or other forms of mechanical transport such as mountain bikes within the Wilderness is allowed.
5. Landing of aircraft or dropping of materials, supplies or persons from aircraft is prohibited.
6. Camping and campfires within 1/4 mile of Sheep Lake is not allowed.
7. Stay on the trail when possible. Short cutting switchbacks creates a path which channels water and accelerates erosion.
8. Pack out everything you bring in and any other trash you may find along the way.
9. Use pack stoves, especially in areas of heavy use. If a campfire is necessary, make a small fire without rocks around it. Rocks and the soil are easily scarred by fire. Make sure your fire is dead out and erase all signs of fire when you leave.
10. Bury human waste at least 100 feet from lakes and streams and 6 inches in the soil so it will decompose naturally.
11. Wash at least 50 feet from lakes and streams. Use a biodegradable soap.

Personal Safety is a constant consideration in the Wilderness. Wilderness users face inherent risk of adverse weather conditions, isolation, physical hazards, and lack of rapid communication. Listed below are some important safety concerns:

Giardia is a microscopic organism found in water which can cause diarrhea, nausea, weakness, and a fever. Chlorine and Iodine are ineffective, but boiling your water for 5-10 minutes will kill the organism.

Hypothermia is a lowering of the body's core temperature which can lead to death. Symptoms include shivering, tiredness, slurred speech and disorientation. Prevention—Keep the victim warm and dry and give hot drinks if possible. Do not give the victim any alcoholic beverages. Get professional medical assistance immediately.

Emergency Contacts:

Delta County Sheriff's Department: (970)874-2000,
Gunnison County Sheriff's Department:
(970)641-8000, or 911.

West Elk Wilderness



*Sheep Lake
West Elk Wilderness*

*Gunnison National Forest
Paonia Ranger District*



For any questions or comments please contact:
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison
National Forests Supervisors Office
2250 Highway 50
Delta, CO 81416
(970) 874-6600 www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug

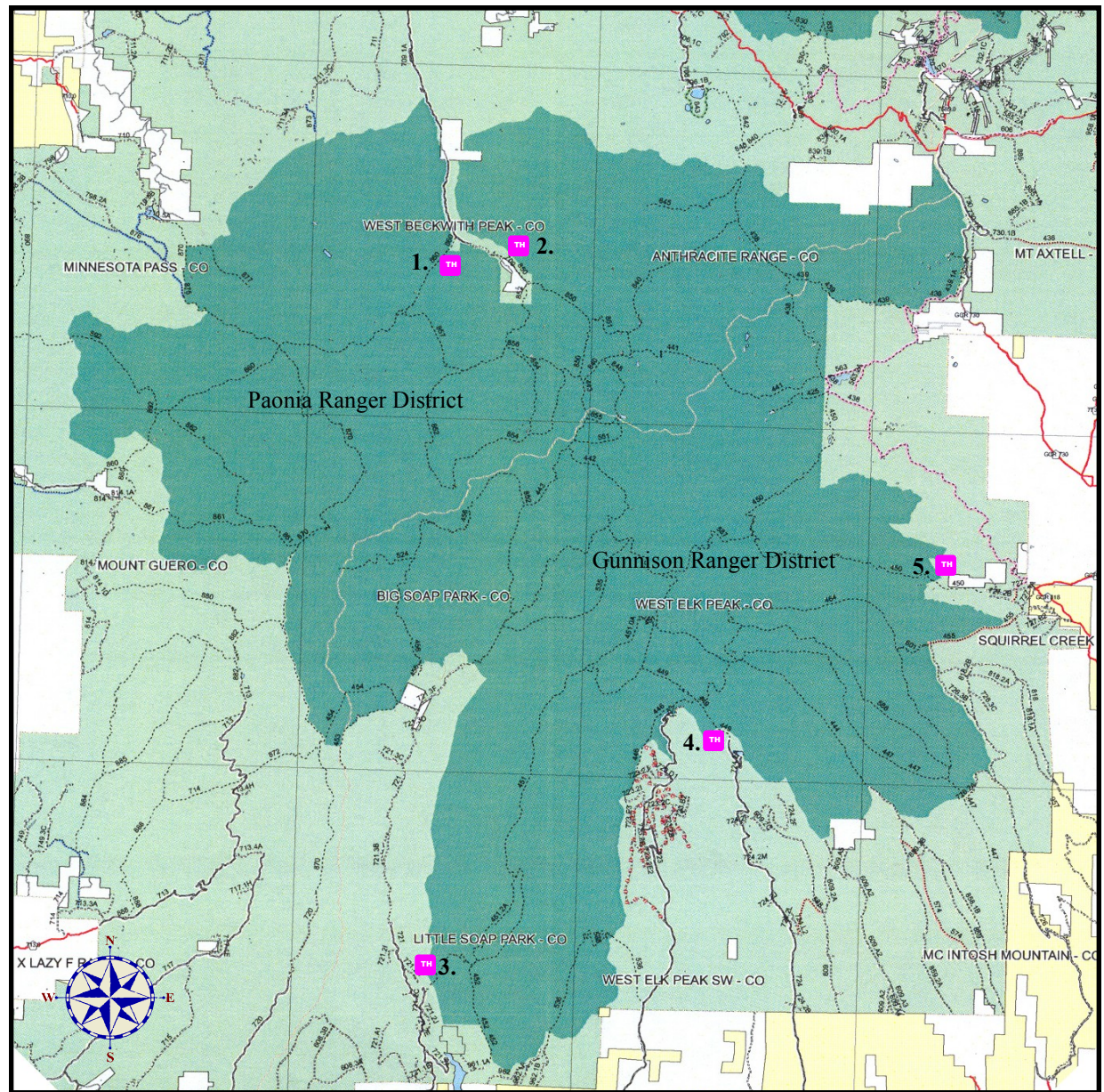
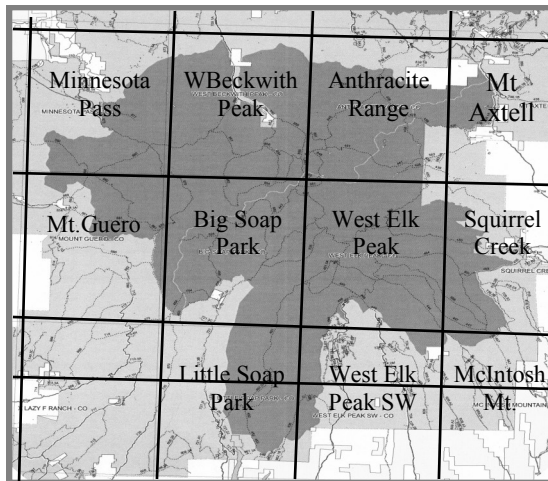


This map is not intended for use as a trail map. US Geological Survey 7 1/2 minute topographic maps show the level of detail needed for wilderness travel use. You can buy these maps at most sporting goods stores or directly from USGS at:

US Geological Survey
Denver Federal Center
P.O. Box 25046
Denver, CO 80225
www.usgs.gov

The following maps cover the West Elk Wilderness Area:

Minnesota Pass, W. Beckwith Peak, Anthracite Range, Mt. Guero, Big Soap Park, West Elk Peak, Squirrel Creek, Little Soap Park, West Elk Peak SW, & McIntosh Mt.



For more information write or call:

Gunnison National Forest

Gunnison Ranger District
216 North Colorado
Gunnison, CO 81230
(970) 641-0471

Paonia Ranger District
P.O. Box 1030
Paonia, CO 81428
(970) 527-4131

Trail Heads:

1. Throughline
2. Little Robinson
3. Soap Creek
4. Rainbow Lake

