



USDA Forest Service
San Juan National Forest
Pagosa Ranger District

Trip Planning Information South San Juan Wilderness



The South San Juan Wilderness encompasses the eastern extent of the San Juan Mountain Range, including a segment of the Continental Divide. Originally designated as Wilderness by Congress in 1980, it is a component of the National Wilderness Preservation System. The information within this handout will assist you as you prepare for your trip. Please carry it with you.

It's wild out there!

Be sure to carry a current topographical map of the area. The South San Juan is large, remote, and wild. Signing is limited to junctions of Forest Service system trails and does not give mileages. Due to vandalism or harshness of conditions, signs may be damaged or missing.

Weather

Expect and be prepared for rain, hail, snow, or biting wind at any time of the year. Intense afternoon thunderstorms are common in summer. Lower elevations are usually free of the winter snowpack by mid-June, but higher areas may be snow-covered into late July or mid-August. Carry clothing and equipment which will keep you warm and dry, even when day-hiking.

High Elevation

Elevations range from about 8,000 to over 13,000 feet. High altitude sickness is a potential problem and can be fatal. Monitor yourself for symptoms – irritability, headache, dizziness, drowsiness, nausea, clouded thinking ability. Symptoms may also include raspy breathing, rapid heartbeat when resting, and difficulty sleeping. Move to lower elevation and drink lots of water. If symptoms persist, seek medical aid.

High Water

During spring snow melt, high fast water and muddy conditions are common. Water levels of streams and rivers may rise dangerously with warm weather or after rainstorms. Use caution when crossing or delay crossing until water levels drop.

Wilderness Regulations

In addition to general Forest regulations, the following regulations are in effect to help ensure the protection of the wilderness environment.

Group Size

Maximum group size is 15 people per group, with a maximum combination of people and stock not to exceed 25.

Livestock and pets

- Recreational livestock are prohibited from being restrained within 100 feet of lakeshores and streams or within riparian areas.
- Pets must be under voice control or physical restraint.

Travel and Equipment

- Possession of motorized equipment and equipment used for mechanical transport are prohibited. This includes the use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment, bicycles, hang gliders, and carts.
- Use of aircraft to land or drop people or materials is prohibited, with the exception of agency-approved administrative use or emergency search-and-rescue operations.
- Shortcutting of switchbacks is prohibited.

Camping

Camping, campfires, and restraining or grazing of recreational livestock are not permitted within 200 feet of **Bear Lake, Blue Lake, Green Lake, and Red Lake.**

Forest-wide Regulations

The following regulations are in effect in this area. Violators may be cited and fined.

Stock Feed

All hay, cubed hay, straw, mulch, and other products in your possession on the Forest must be certified as weed-free by a sanctioned certification program.

Campfires

Do not leave campfires unattended. Make sure fire is out and ashes are cold.

Trash

Pack out and properly dispose of all refuse. Do not bury trash.

Damage to trees

Cutting or damaging live trees without a permit is prohibited.

Caches

Caches or stashing of equipment for more than 14 days is not permitted. Geo-caches are not permitted within the San Juan National Forest. Caching is subject to seizure and fines.

Outfitters and Guides

Commercial guides and outfitters must hold a valid permit to operate within National Forests. Contact the Forest to confirm that your outfitter is permitted.

Reserved Campsites

No camping is allowed in or within 100 feet of areas signed as “reserved” or “assigned” to permitted commercial outfitters.

Hunting

Hunting is permitted under regulation by the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

To keep it wild . . .

Become familiar with the enclosed information about regulations and conditions you can expect to encounter in the area. These recommendations will help you to Leave No Trace of your visit.

Trip Planning

Schedule your trip to avoid times of high use. Split larger parties into groups of 4-6.

Travel and Camping

- Travel and camp on durable surfaces, such as established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses, or snow.
- When hikers meet horses or other stock on the trail, have all hikers in your party move to one side and well off the trail. When safe to do so, move off the trail to the downhill side. Speak to riders to let the stock know you are not predators.
- Camp at least 200 feet from water. Select a previously-used site when camping in heavily-used areas. In areas where there are no established sites, move your camp before impacts begin to show.
- If you choose to have a campfire, be sure the area is not closed to campfires, then keep it small. In areas at or above treeline or which are heavily used, avoid building campfires due to the limited supply of down and dead wood.
- Do all washing of yourself, clothes, and dishes far from water sources, using biodegradable soap or no soap. Scatter wash water 200 feet from camp and water sources.
- Bury human waste six inches deep in individual catholes far from camp, trails, and water sources.
- Pack out all that you pack in – food scraps and trash. Do not bury any trash or garbage.

Preserve the Past

Examine, but do not touch cultural or historic structures and artifacts.

Wildlife

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Never feed animals.
- Protect wildlife from your food by using bear-resistant methods of storing or hanging food, trash, and other scented items.

Pets and Livestock

- Keep pets under control, preferably leashed, to protect wildlife and lessen conflict with other visitors.
- If traveling with stock, ask for Leave No Trace information for stock users.
- When hikers with llamas meet horses or other stock, move well off the trail and speak to riders. Horses and mules which are not familiar with llamas may be startled by the odor or appearance.
- Keep restrained stock far (at least 100 feet) from water sources, trails, and campsites.
- Horses should be tied to trees only for short periods of time. Do not allow stock to damage trees. When using a hitchline, electric fence or hobbles, move animals frequently to avoid overgrazing.

Respect other visitors

Avoid loud voices or noises; let nature’s sounds prevail.