

Avalanches

TAKE AN AVALANCHE COURSE & CONSULT AVALANCHE FORECASTS

Statistics

- **Ground zero.** Colorado leads all U.S. states including Alaska and all Canadian provinces in avalanche deaths.
- **User-caused.** 90% of avalanche fatalities are triggered by the victim or victim's party.
- **Slope angle.** Avalanches usually occur on slopes steeper than 30° and most often on slopes 35–50°. Most expert ski runs have sections 34° or steeper.
- **Danger ratings.** Of five Danger Levels on the North American Avalanche Danger Scale, Considerable Danger (Level 3) claims the most lives. Consult avalanche advisories often.

Safe travel

- **Avoid potential avalanche areas.** Use the terrain to your advantage, avoiding steep slopes, cornices and gullies or depressions. Check for clues to an unstable snowpack.
- **Travel one at a time and spread out** to avoid exposing others. Watch each other closely from safe locations. If on slide terrain, avoid going to help someone whose sled is stuck.
- **Tracks do not mean a slope is safe.** Steep slopes are only safe when the snowpack is stable.
- **When climbing,** the best ascent routes are low angle ridges and dense trees. Do not ride off cornices.
- **Don't stop in or below avalanche paths.** Never descend directly above a partner or other group or stop or park at the bottom of a steep slope.
- **Stay alert to changing snow stability** due to changes in aspect, elevation, or weather (*heavy precipitation, wind, or warming*).
- **Choose slopes that have been stripped by the wind** (*windward*) over slopes that have been loaded (*leeward*). Be wary of steep, smooth leeward slopes.
- **Travel in small groups of 2, 3 or 4.** In large groups it is harder to communicate, travel safely, and make good decisions.
- **Be aware of changing travel conditions,** such as snowpack conditions, visibility, wind, temperature and barometric pressure, precipitation, running and standing water, ice, slope, humidity, and speed traveled.
- **Avoid emotion-driven decisions** such as “it looks so beautiful, “we’ve waited all week, “it already slid, “we’re fully equipped, “someone already laid tracks, “we hiked all the way up, and “it’ll probably be okay.” Base decisions on logical thinking. It’s okay to call it off and find a safer route or try another day.

Red flags

- **Recent avalanches.** Current slides indicate more are possible.
- **Signs of instability.** Shooting cracks, collapsing, whumping, and hollow drum-like sounds.
- **Recent precipitation.** Significant rain or snow in the past 24 hours increases snowpack instability. Many avalanches occur the first clear day after a storm. Sun does not equate to safety.
- **Wind.** Wind loads leeward slopes even when it’s not snowing.
- **Warming.** Rapid warming and gravity can combine to cause the snow to creep downhill and become less stable.

Safety gear

- **Readiness.** All the right gear is useless if it isn't used properly. Carry all tools on your person or on a pack that you wear. Ensure everyone in your group has all necessary rescue gear on their body and knows how to use it. Critical items for each member include a transceiver, probe and shovel.
- **Transceiver.** These pinpoint the spot above a buried person. Make sure all beacons work in transmit and receive mode.
- **Probe.** Systematic probing can help determine the probable location and depth of a victim.
- **Shovel.** 3 feet of snow over a buried person can weigh 2 tons. Shovel on your knees and learn the best techniques for single, duo and group shoveling based on various depths.
- **Airbag.** Statistics are encouraging for this new gear category. A properly used airbag can help clear airspace around your head, protect from impacts, and float wearers to the surface.

If caught

- **Try to get off the slab,** hang onto the downhill side of trees. Angle to the edge of the slide.
- **Try to roll onto your back, face up, with feet downhill.** Swim hard to stay atop the moving snow. Grab trees, claw into the bed surface.
- **Before the slide stops,** try to thrust part of your self above the surface, and try to make airspace around your mouth.
- **If completely buried,** try to remain calm. Conserve oxygen.



Rescuer tips

- **Watch the victim,** establish the last-seen area.
- **Question any witnesses** about the number of victims, their last seen locations, and whether they were wearing beacons.
- **Make sure it's safe to search.** The area is unlikely to slide again unless it has reloaded or has adjoining avalanche paths that have not released and funnel into the same area.
- **Search the debris field** below the last-seen area. Seek clues. Probe around in likely areas such as benches, dips, rocks, tree wells, and the toe of debris.
- **Leave clues in place** including sleds, they help establish the victim's likely line of travel. Most buried snowmobilers are buried within 200 feet of their sleds, often within 40 feet and upslope of their machines.
- **If wearing beacons,** conduct one or more beacon searches.
- **If visual and beacon searches are unsuccessful,** systematically probe the most likely areas.
- **When you locate a victim,** dig rapidly but carefully. Free the victim's mouth and chest of snow first. Be alert for airway problems, hypothermia, and injuries.

Avalanche forecasts & courses

- The following websites are good starting points for up-to-date avalanche conditions, forecasts and courses:
- [cavalanchecenter.org](#)
 - [avalanche.state.co.us](#)
 - [avalanche.org](#)
 - [avalanche-center.org](#)
 - [fsavalanche.com](#)
 - [americanavalancheassociation.org](#)

Winter recreation tips from Tread Lightly!

Travel responsibly

Make a realistic plan, stick to it, give a responsible person your mapped route and return times, and notify that person when you return. If a party is overdue, notify the County Sheriff, who can alert or activate search and rescue parties, and notify authorities if the person returns. Know where you are going. Match your route difficulty and trip length to your physical condition and ability. Be aware of worsening body conditions, such as dehydration, exhaustion, hypothermia, sunburn, frostbite, snowblindness and altitude sickness. At night, use extra caution, wear reflective clothing, and slow down.

Respect the rights of others

Respect other recreation users and private property so all can enjoy their winter experiences. If crossing private property, ask permission from the landowner(s). Respect established ski tracks. In parts of the National Forest, skiers, snowshoers and snowmobilers share routes and areas. Manage your experience by knowing where you may encounter other users. If stopping on trails, pull as far to the right as possible. Be safe!



Educate yourself

Know where you are going. Contact local land managers for area restrictions and closures. Check the weather forecasts and avalanche conditions. Bring and carry emergency items. Layer clothing and wear a durable waterproof outer shell and footwear. If a person develops hypothermia, rub them vigorously, get them into dry clothes, and give them warm non-alcoholic liquids.

Avoid sensitive areas

Avoid spooking wildlife and livestock and keep your distance. Be respectful of wildlife's wintering habitats. Do not disturb historical, archaeological, or paleontological sites.

Do your part

Carry a trash bag and pick up litter left by others. Pack out what you pack in. Dispose of sanitary waste by packing it out. Keep pets under control. To benefit wildlife and others, consider leaving your pet at home. Dogs can damage ski tracks and if you take your dog, we suggest using ungroomed or lightly-used areas. Pack out pet waste on trails, trailheads and in sensitive areas. Build a trail community by getting to know other types of recreationists that share your favorite trail.

Tips for snowmobilers

- A valid annual Colorado permit is required. Travel only in areas open to snowmobiling and with adequate snow cover. Snowmobiles are not permitted on developed ski areas, in designated Wilderness, and on some trails established for cross-country skiing. Check the local ranger district for full information.
- **Understand** your vehicle and its controls. Travel in control. Don't mix riding with fatigue, alcohol or drugs.
 - **Buddy up** with two or three riders to reduce vulnerability to accidents and breakdowns. Do not accommodate extra riders on your sled over the delineated limit.
 - **Ride single file,** keep to the right, and pass on the left side, and only when the trail is clear. Yield to skiers, snowshoers, and those passing or traveling uphill.
 - **Wear a helmet,** eye protection and other safety gear.
 - **Make sure** your snowmobile is mechanically up to the task. Carry tools and supplies for roadside repairs.
 - **When stopping,** pull off the trail as far to the right as possible.
 - **If you break down,** stay with your sled and near the trail, but be prepared to pack out if it looks like the best option.
 - **Avoid spills** when refueling. Carry a spill kit. Sleds parked or stranded for several days can tip when snow melts, causing resource damage and leaking fluids.
 - **Cross roadways** at a 90 degree angle.
 - **Cross streams** at bridges and culverts.
 - **Avoid frozen waterways** and lakes and avoid riding too closely to vegetation and the base of trees.
 - **Low snow, don't go.** A snowmobile's spinning tracks damage plants and soils just below the snow's surface. Hill climbing in these conditions is especially damaging.
 - **Be able to stop** in half the visible distance ahead. Pump your brake on descents to avoid locking the brakes and skidding.
 - **When approaching corners,** reduce your speed and lean into turns with your upper body to enhance maneuverability.



Welcome to the beauty of winter in the Gunnison National Forest.

This brochure describes various winter recreation activities on the Gunnison National Forest surrounding Crested Butte, Colorado. Opportunities for motorized and non-motorized winter recreation abound.

Enjoy the serene Rocky Mountain winter and please remember humans are just one of many species in this environment. Winter is a time of stress for forest wildlife and disturbances can have lasting consequences.

Please respect private property. Know which areas are private and which are public. Maps are available from the Forest Service to assist in determining boundaries of National Forest System lands and other public and private lands.

Winter Recreation

around Crested Butte

For more information on winter recreation opportunities, and a variety of maps showing public and private lands, contact:

USDA Forest Service

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, & Gunnison National Forests
[www.fs.usda.gov/gmg](#)

GUNNISON NATIONAL FOREST

Gunnison Ranger District

216 N. Colorado St.
Gunnison, CO 81230
PHONE: (970) 641-0471

Paonia Ranger District

403 N. Rio Grande Ave.
MAIL TO: P.O. Box 1030
Paonia, CO 81428
PHONE: (970) 527-4131

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Activities by drainage

For an explanation of symbols, see access legend on map panel.

Kebler East

Kebler West OPEN AREA

Kebler West CLOSED AREA

Irwin

The Gunnison County SnoTrackers Club grooms snowmobile trails on Kebler Pass Road, Ohio Pass Road (from the Kebler side), Splains Gulch and the Irwin area. With 55 miles of groomed trails and snow-play areas, this area is a popular place to play in the Crested Butte backcountry. Because of heavy snowmobile traffic, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing on groomed routes are discouraged.

TRAILHEAD PARKING (KEBLER PASS) Because Kebler is a popular snowmobile area, parking may be congested. Snowmobile parking at Kebler Pass winter trailhead is a privilege that can be compromised if excessive parking issues, trash and snowmobile abandonment occurs. Do not abandon your snowmobile, especially in spring when they can tip over and leak gas and oil into Coal Creek. Parked snowmobiles that block other users are subject to towing.

Slate River

This drainage is popular with skiers and snowshoers. Snowmobiles must stay on the road through Land Trust property and private property until reaching the National Forest boundary. Many consider the upper drainage to be expert terrain. The Crested Butte Nordic Center periodically grooms the road to Pittsburgh for track and skate skiing in cooperation with Gunnison County.

TRAILHEAD PARKING The Slate River winter trailhead is on County property. Please do not park in the turnaround; allow room for snowplows and trailer turnaround. There is no overnight parking at this trailhead.

Washington Gulch

This area is popular with skiers west of the road with snowmobiling open on the east side of the road up to Elkton Hills. In this area, snowmobile riders must have a Washington Gulch sticker, regulations and use map, free to owners of state-registered sleds at the Crested Butte Chamber of Commerce or Gunnison Ranger District office. See Inset 1 on the map on the reverse side for applicable regulations.

TRAILHEAD PARKING The Washington Gulch winter trailhead is on County property. There is no overnight parking here.

Lower East River

Upper East River

This area, also known as the Gothic Corridor, is managed for **NON-MOTORIZED** recreation. The area is closed to snowmobiles and snowcats, including in the Rock Creek drainage on Mt. Baldy above Elkton. Dogsledding is allowed but discouraged.

West Brush Creek

The emphasis is on **CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING**. Snowmobiling and dogsledding are restricted to West Brush Creek Road and Deer Creek Road. Snowcat use is prohibited.

Middle Brush Creek

The emphasis is on **CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING**. Middle Brush Creek is closed to snowmobiles and snowcats. Dogsledding is restricted to Brush Creek Road.

Lower East Brush Creek

Upper East Brush Creek

The boundary between Lower and Upper Brush Creek is where the Brush Creek Trail (#400) leaves the drainage and heads north below the Friends Hut.

- **Lower East Brush Creek** emphasizes **CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING**. The area is closed to snowmobiling and snowcat use. Dogsledding is restricted to East Brush Creek Road.
- **Upper East Brush Creek** is closed to dogsleds and snowcats.

Farris Creek

This area is also called Strand Hill.

Lower Cement Creek

Upper Cement Creek

The boundary between Lower and Upper Cement Creek is where the summer Block & Tackle Trail (#545) meets Cement Creek Road.

- **Lower Cement Creek** restricts snowmobiling and snowcat use to Cement Creek Road. Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing opportunities are plentiful. Dogsledding is discouraged.
- **Upper Cement Creek** is open to snowmobiling and non-motorized uses. Dogsledding is discouraged.

Oh-Be-Joyful

Ohio Creek OPEN AREA

Ohio Creek CLOSED AREA

Ohio Creek is open to snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, dogsledding and snowshoeing. Snowcat use is allowed but discouraged. Ohio Creek also includes a **CLOSED AREA** (WEST ELK WILDERNESS) where motorized activities are prohibited.

Designated Wilderness

Crested Butte is surrounded by congressionally-designated **WILDERNESS** (WEST ELK, RAGGEDS, and MAROON BELLS-SNOWMASS) where motorized and mechanized travel are prohibited. Snowmobile riders are obligated to know where the boundaries are.

West Elk

Raggeds

Maroon Bells-Snowmass

Preserve privileges & avoid violations

Recreation use designations in this brochure are based on the 1995 NEPA decision (*and subsequent revisions*) on winter recreation around Crested Butte. Winter recreation on National Forest System lands is managed by Forest Orders and the Code of Federal Regulations. Violations are enforceable. It is the responsibility of the user to know which activities are allowed in given areas. This brochure/map is a guide. For additional details ask the local ranger district. Common violations include *unlawful parking, motorized travel in Wilderness, littering, snowmobile abandonment, and other activities where prohibited.*



Winter Recreation around Crested Butte

ACTIVITIES

	Snowmobiling
	X-C Skiing
	Dogsledding
	Snowshoeing
	Snowcat Touring/Skiing

ACCESS

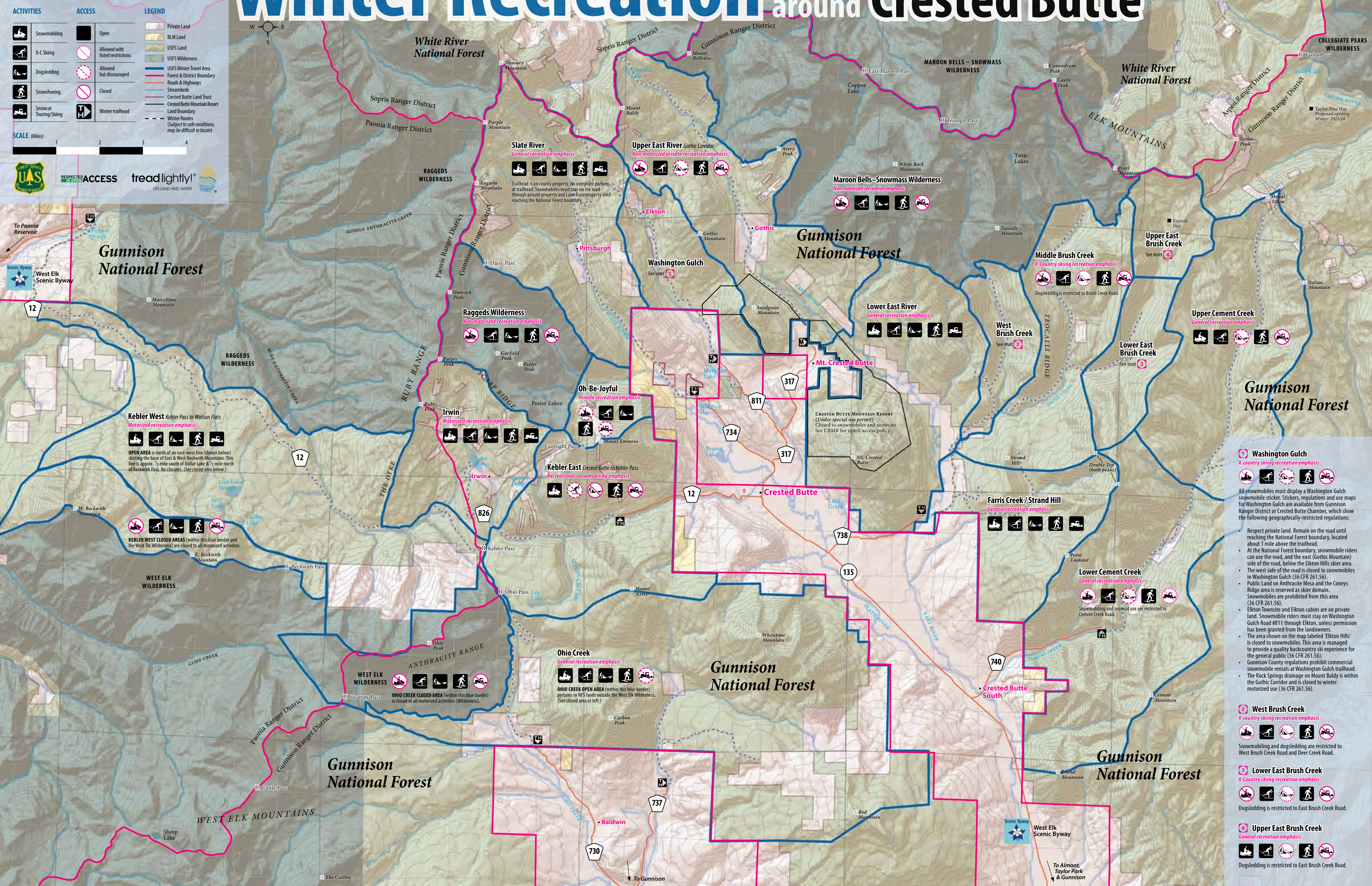
	Open
	Allowed with listed restrictions
	Allowed but discouraged
	Closed
	Winter trailhead

LEGEND

	Private Land
	BLM Land
	USFS Land
	USFS Wilderness
	USFS Winter Travel Area
	Forest & District Boundary
	Roads & Highways
	Streambeds
	Crested Butte Land Trust
	Crested Butte Mountain Resort
	Land Boundary
	Winter Routes (Subject to safe conditions, may be difficult to locate)

SCALE (Miles)
0 1 2 3 4

RESPECTED ACCESS treadlightly!
ON LAND AND WATER



- 1 Washington Gulch**
X-country skiing recreation emphasis

All snowmobiles must display a Washington Gulch snowmobile sticker. Stickers, regulations and use maps for Washington Gulch are available from Gunnison Ranger District or Crested Butte Chamber, which show the following geographically-restricted regulations:
 - Respect private land. Remain on the road until reaching the National Forest boundary, located about 1 mile above the trailhead.
 - At the National Forest boundary, snowmobile riders can use the road, and the east (Gothic Mountain) side of the road, below the Elkton Hills skier area.
 - The west side of the road is closed to snowmobiles in Washington Gulch (36 CFR 261.56).
 - Public Land on Anthracite Mesa and the Coney Ridge area is reserved as skier domain. Snowmobiles are prohibited from this area (36 CFR 261.56).
 - Elkton Townsite and Elkton cabins are on private land. Snowmobile riders must stay on Washington Gulch Road #811 through Elkton, unless permission has been granted from the landowners.
 - The area shown on the map labeled 'Elkton Hills' is closed to snowmobiles. This area is managed to provide a quality backcountry ski experience for the general public (36 CFR 261.56).
 - Gunnison County regulations prohibit commercial snowmobile rentals at Washington Gulch trailhead.
 - The Rock Springs drainage on Mount Baldy is within the Gothic Corridor and is closed to winter motorized use (36 CFR 261.56).
- 2 West Brush Creek**
X-country skiing recreation emphasis

Snowmobiling and dogsledding are restricted to West Brush Creek Road and Deer Creek Road.
- 3 Lower East Brush Creek**
X-country skiing recreation emphasis

Dogsledding is restricted to East Brush Creek Road.
- 4 Upper East Brush Creek**
General recreation emphasis

Dogsledding is restricted to East Brush Creek Road.