



Dolores River Canyon Country (DRCC) Protection Campaign

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

DRBA protects and enriches the recreational and ecological values of the Dolores River through advocacy, stewardship and education. We envision permanent protections for the Dolores River and surrounding landscape that support recreation, equitable access, healthy flows, and resilient habitat. DRBA formed 13 years

JEDI Efforts and Impact

DRBA's staff and board members participate in training opportunities and are engaged in ongoing organizational readings and discussions to increase our awareness around justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, and to create lasting holistic changes to our organizational culture and programs. Our organization has been impacted in these

ago to address concerns about ecological and recreational values of the Dolores River below McPhee Reservoir. We have built a solid base of support for the river, developed successful youth and stewardship programs, and have become a primary leader in long term protection work. In the last several years we produced a documentary about the complicated nature of Dolores River issues and released the new Dolores River Guide, including a unique education, outreach, and advocacy component. We coordinate the Dolores River Coalition and the effort to permanently protect the Dolores River Canyon Country (DRCC). We serve the whitewater boating public and as a voice for the river.

Final Success

Final success for the Dolores River Canyon Country (DRCC) Protection Campaign is the long-term protection of 162 miles of the Dolores River below McPhee Dam and up to 450,000 acres of surrounding public lands accomplished through national conservation area legislation or national monument designation.

Location Details

ways: we have a committee made of of board and staff members focused on this work; our strategic plan incorporates JEDI principles; we are actively working to diversify our board and staff, including diversity of gender, age, ethnicity, and geography; our youth programming includes a focus on working with underserved youth and families and making the Dolores River more accessible to all people, including expanding programs with Ute Mountain Ute Tribal youth; and we are committed to working intentionally with Tribes and Pueblos in our advocacy, protection, and defense work.

The DRCC is an iconic landscape widely recognized as a special place needing protection. Incredible scenery, cultural resources, diverse ecology and habitat, and world-class recreation are some of the defining values. The landscape encompasses habitat for wildlife including elk, mule deer, and bighorn sheep, as well as sensitive fish species that thrive in the Dolores River. The landscape includes three Wilderness Study Areas and the river has been found "suitable" for Wild and Scenic designation. The northern region of the DRCC is the most biodiverse, unprotected area in Colorado.

These values are threatened by unchecked mining exploration, unplanned recreation, and impacts from climate change. Under the Trump administration's "energy dominance" agenda, increased uranium mining activity could have detrimental impacts. Threats include fragmenting wildlife habitat, degrading wildlands, and eroding the natural integrity that define the region. Such threats not only diminish the area's ecological and cultural value but also compromise its resilience to climate change and its ability to sustain future generations. While some administrative tools have helped maintain resources, they are also threatened and are not permanent. Without comprehensive conservation action, the DRCC faces escalating risks of habitat loss, resource damage, and the erosion of its exceptional qualities that attract both wildlife and visitors.

Diverse, collaborative discussions about protections for the Dolores have been taking place for decades. A 68,000-acre National Conservation Area (NCA) proposal has emerged spanning three counties in the southern region. This legislation has been introduced in Congress twice, and we anticipate it being introduced again in this Congress.

This bi-partisan proposal has broad support at the local and national level and DRBA continues to work towards its designation. The Dolores River Coalition launched a national monument campaign in 2023 for the northern region. This effort garnered significant support across the state and dramatically moved the needle on conserving the entire landscape. Given the new Administration, the conversation is pivoting to a national conservation area. It is important to build off of the momentum rather than pausing proactive work, and DRBA continues to be a leader in that effort. At the same time we must work with partners around the state to defend the Dolores Region, public lands, and policies from new threats.

Biodiversity in Project Area

Landscape-scale connected ecosystems such as the DRCC are critical to ensure resilience as impacts from climate change accelerate. As previously noted, large portions of the DRCC are notable for biodiversity of plant species, and the river corridor supports a wide variety of wildlife, birds, and fish. Over 66 bird species utilize the Dolores River either seasonally or year-round, and it provides exceptional habitat in an otherwise arid region. Enduring land and river protections and flow-focused solutions are critical for the long-term vitality of the river, the surrounding landscape, and its significant cultural, ecological, and recreational values.

If this project across the landscape is successful it would not only preserve a critical stretch of river and surrounding wildlands. In the south, though not contiguous, Canyon of the Ancients National Monument is nearby, as well as some higher-elevation Forest Service lands that provide year-round habitat for wildlife, notably bighorn sheep and elk. In the north, while separated by private lands, protections would offer a close proximity to both Escalante Dominguez National Conservation Area, as well as McInnis National Conservation Area.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

The Dolores River region provides remarkable local benefits; notably diverse recreational opportunities and resulting economic inputs. It is one of the largest, undeveloped regions in Colorado and boasts one of the longest contiguous stretches of river in the West. Recreational opportunities include whitewater boating, mountain and gravel biking, motorized recreation on certain trails, camping, hiking, wildlife watching, and more. As this area becomes more popular, it is critical to get ahead of increased visitation by planning for the future. A focused management plan associated with a designation would provide for that.

An important aspect of this work that DRBA has led is providing opportunities for Tribal Members from the Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute Tribes to connect to the DRCC by organizing overnight field visits. This has included visiting cultural sites, swimming in the river, and spending time telling stories. We plan to organize more of these opportunities for reconnecting indigenous communities to the landscape in the coming year and beyond.

Recreation on public lands and subsequent tourism is a significant portion of the state's economy. BLM lands contributed \$8.8 billion to Colorado's economy in Fiscal Year 2023 and 39,000 jobs in Colorado are tied to BLM public lands. Recreation on these public lands supports numerous Colorado companies that provide gear, food, and other supplies to recreationists.

Conservation is also beneficial for rural economies. Proximity to protective designations, such as national monuments, are shown to increase the number of jobs and establishments without decreasing the number of jobs in

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

The DRCC Protection Campaign is DRBA's primary advocacy project. We serve as the hub of coordination for the Campaign which is focused on permanently protecting the values of the Dolores River and surrounding landscape and guarding the region from further threats. DRBA has been working on grassroots protections since 2015, and remains the primary organization leading on the NCA legislation in the southern region. We are the only organization focused exclusively on the Dolores River and are uniquely situated to coordinate the Dolores River Coalition and provide leadership for protection work.

It remains critical to get the NCA legislation in the south reintroduced. In addition to including important protections for that portion of the DRCC, it is widely supported bipartisan legislation that will play an important role in broader negotiations on lands bills. The national monument effort in the north (Mesa and Montrose County) is pivoting towards an NCA discussion as well. We anticipate that an initial formal proposal will be released by Senator Bennet in 2025 after the southern bill is reintroduced. If agreement can be reached, this would likely lead to an amendment to the southern bill or introduction of a second bill.

It is critical to keep moving protection work forward for the Dolores River Canyon Country, while also focusing on defense of the region and public lands in general. During this Administration, we are already seeing attacks to public lands from Executive and Secretarial orders mandating energy dominance, legislation threatening the Antiquities Act and other bedrock environmental laws, and mass firing of federal employees. DRBA is monitoring impacts to the DRCC and the broader region, and mobilizing community members around these issues.

STRATEGY 1: Provide leadership and Coalition coordination - ongoing
-Host bi-weekly Coalition meetings
-Coordinate Leadership Team - includes DRBA, Colorado Wildlands Project, The Wilderness Society, Conservation Colorado
- Lead Communication Team and participate in the West Slope Organizing

Key Decision Makers

existing establishments or without impacting mining Conservation and well-planned recreation that comes along with protective designations can provide sustainable tourism opportunities, additional resources and infrastructure to rural communities, and help to recruit and maintain employees.

Key decision makers central to the success of the DRCC Protection Campaign include Senators Bennet and Hickenlooper, Tribal Nations (notably the three Ute Tribes), and Congressman Hurd. Senator Bennet has been Colorado's leader on Dolores River protection work, therefore he is our primary decision-making target in the Senate. Both Senators have introduced the Dolores River NCA legislation in Congress and support protecting the landscape, but have agreed that Bennet will continue to lead the southern bill as well as efforts in the north. Congressman Hurd is expected to easily support the southern legislation with all counties and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe in support, as well as myriad other stakeholders. Hurd's approach in the north is less known, but more likely to support the NCA discussion now happening there.

DRBA and other coalition members have employed a number of strategies to engage with decision-makers associated with this campaign. Transparent conversations with staff from both senate offices occur regularly, and new relationships are being built with Hurd staff. The coalition continues to build support from businesses, local elected officials, community leaders, recreational and conservation organizations, sportsman groups, and others. We have also been part of opportunities to connect the Senators and their staff to the landscape including river trips, flyovers, and hikes. Engagement from the business community in Washington DC, in meetings on the ground, and through media outlets has been very important to the campaign and will continue to be so. We have worked closely with TCA members and hope to continue to do so. In our experience utilizing the compelling economic voice for conservation outcomes is very effective.

calls

- Maintain infrastructure and stability of the Coalition including Google drive and listserv, Campaign Plan, strategy documents and campaign materials
- Organize field trips and in-person meetings/briefings
- Maintain and manage the campaign website and supporter email list and communication, and run Protect the Dolores social media accounts

STRATEGY 2: Advance long-term protection initiatives in both the southern and northern regions of DRCC

- Maintain strong working relationships with congressional staff and other key decision makers
- Coordinate/facilitate field trips with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe; Ensure follow-up and communication about the campaign with the three Ute Tribes and staff: Engage community members in educational opportunities
- Support the reintroduction of the bipartisan NCA legislation for the southern part of the landscape (Montezuma, Dolores, San Miguel Counties) early in the new Congress and push for swift movement through the legislative process to ensure the bill is poised to be included in any lands package that gets traction during this Congress: Coordinate diverse local NCA Team; Secure new support letters from counties, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and other stakeholders as needed; Respond to requests from Senators in support of legislation; Secure support from Congressman Hurd
- Build off the momentum from the national monument campaign in the northern landscape (Montrose and Mesa Counties), to propel the new NCA discussion forward: Continue to build widespread support from community members, businesses, local elected officials, and other entities for protecting the lands in Mesa and Montrose Counties, through outreach and education, growth of business support, and effective communications plan; Reach out to entities that may have been hesitant of a national monument but who are likely to be supportive of an NCA; Organize statewide comments and media response when Senator Bennet releases draft proposal in 2025; Existing NCA bill is amended to include the north or a second bill is introduced in this Congress.

STRATEGY 3: Defend the DRCC from attacks such as mining and oil and gas development, public land selloffs, dismantling off community-led management plans, and efforts to remove federal employees and funding for public lands - ongoing

- Monitor and take action on specific threats to the Dolores landscape including mining and other development projects, efforts to modify or reduce conservation measures in resource management planning for the Dolores area, and impacts to local land management field offices and staff
- Engage in Colorado Lands calls to align Dolores River Coalition with broader efforts where there is a direct nexus for the Coalition to engage
- Coordinate local efforts to protect public lands and support fired federal workers in southwest Colorado

Elevate Voices

Engaging Tribal partners in long-term protection efforts for the Dolores is a priority of the Coalition and for DRBA. DRBA is continuing to coordinate efforts to work with the three Ute Tribes in the region. Several Tribes have been identified with an ancestral connection to the region, and the Coalition is committed to understanding the myriad Tribal positions on conservation efforts and priorities, and to facilitate their participation to the extent and manner they deem appropriate or desirable.

DRBA has led multiple field trips for Tribal members with the goal of connecting them to their ancestral lands in the DRCC. We continue to maintain relationships, share information, coordinate opportunities including a film screening and overflight. DRBA has also coordinated travel for members of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe to listening sessions organized by Colorado Senators. We will continue to provide information, opportunities to connect with the Dolores River, and lift of Indigenous voices.

DRBA is also working on an ethnography project focused on reconnecting Tribal Nations to the DRCC and to inform future management of public lands. This project, in collaboration with a local ethnographer, BLM and USFS, and several regional Tribes, is ongoing and likely to wrap up in 2026. Ideally, a Resource Management Plan spurred by an NCA designation would be able to utilize information from this project.

TCA Funding Plan

Funding from The Conservation Alliance will support coordination and management of the Dolores River Coalition, staff's leadership role in the Coalition's work and various teams and committees, and overall advancement of Dolores River Canyon Country protections and defense. It is important for momentum to protect the Dolores to continue, despite the political challenges, and DRBA is situated to ensure that work is coordinated and flexible. Support from TCA will allow us to react swiftly to

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

- The Dolores River Coalition is effectively coordinated and organized to ensure inclusion and alignment of diverse interests
- NCA legislation in the southern region is supported, reintroduced, and advancing; and this bi-partisan NCA legislation plays a positive role in broader lands bill negotiations
- Consensus is reached on an NCA for the northern region leading to either an amendment of the southern legislation or introduction of a second bill
- Broad state-wide support for protecting the Dolores is sustained and grown
- At least three meaningful outreach opportunities or field visits with the three Ute Tribes to connect Tribal members with their ancestral lands in the Dolores region are provided

How long it took to complete application

15+ hours



opportunities to organize around Dolores protections and defensive needs, travel across the landscape as needed, and ensure a thoughtful strategy for Dolores protections moving into the next year. The advancement of the southern NCA legislation will also play a role in broader negotiations about lands bills. TCA's financial support along with support from staff and member companies will help move this forward in a strategic manner.

Confidential Items

While we don't want the proposal to be available to the public, we don't feel like there is anything that needs to be kept confidential from member companies.

**Other Relevant
Application Details**

