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## Dolores River Canyon Country (DRCC) Protection Campaign

Applying Organization	Dolores River Boating Advocates	Application Date	5/15/2026
Applying Contact	Amber Clark	Status	Submitted
Record Type	Member Collective	Created By	Amber Clark, 5/15/2026, 3:00 PM
		Create Account	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Project Overview

Project Name	Dolores River Canyon Country (DRCC) Protection Campaign	Requested Amount	\$40,000.00
Project/Campaign Name	Dolores River Canyon Country (DRCC) Protection Campaign		
Type of Project	Designation; Management Planning; Defense	Project Multiple Locations	
Project Location (State or Territory)	CO	Longitude	Longitude 108°48'59.77W
Latitude	Latitude 37°53'45.46N		

### Organization Details

Organization Name	Dolores River Boating Advocates	Primary address for organization	PO Box 1173 Dolores, Colorado 81323 United States
Contact Name	Amber Clark	Contact Title	Executive Director
Contact Email Address	amber@doloresriverboating.org		
Annual Operating Budget	\$478,000.00	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	4	Main Phone	970-799-8704
Total Membership	1,500	Organization Website/Social Media Feed	https://www.doloresriverboating.org___https://www.facebook.com/DoloresRiverBoatingAdvocates
BIPOC-led	No	C-Suite Staff	

### Grant Details

Awarded Amount		Awarded Date	
Funding Program			
Primary Project Type		Secondary Project Type	
Term Start Date		Term End Date	

### Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization	DRBA protects the ecological, recreational, and cultural values of the Dolores River corridor through community connection and education, advocacy, and stewardship. We envision that the Dolores River corridor is permanently protected, sustaining resilient ecological and cultural resources, healthy flows, river recreation, and equitable access for the benefit of the diverse human and natural communities that depend on and value it. DRBA formed 14 years 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 and defense work. We coordinate the Dolores River Coalition and the effort to permanently protect the Dolores River Canyon Country (DRCC). DRBA is a conservation	Location Details	The DRCC is one of Colorado's most iconic landscapes and the focus of nearly 50 years of protection efforts. Located in southwest Colorado to the east of the Utah/Colorado state line, the landscape boasts Incredible scenery, cultural resources, diverse ecology and habitat, and world-class recreation. In fact, the northern region of the DRCC is the most biodiverse, unprotected area in Colorado. 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.  These values are threatened by unchecked mining exploration, public land selloff efforts, attacks on management plans, unplanned recreation, and impacts from climate change. Federal efforts to sell
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group with a boating habit, serving the whitewater boating public and as a voice for the river corridor.

public lands in 2025 did not include those with special designations (such as national monuments or national conservation areas) and the unprotected nature of the entire DRCC makes the region susceptible to future selloff efforts. 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.

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 three times, though not yet in the House in this current Congress. This bipartisan proposal has broad support at the local and national level and DRBA continues to work towards its introduction in the House and 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. In 2025 that conversation pivoted to the idea of an NCA and Senator Bennet is currently committed to moving a draft proposal forward in 2026. DRBA continues to be a leader in that effort.

**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.

**Impact on Climate and Biodiversity**

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 critical 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 is successful it would not only preserve a critical stretch of river and surrounding wildlands in the Dolores region but it also helps connect already protected areas. 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 McClinnis National Conservation Area.

**Expected Economic & Recreational Impact**

The Dolores River region provides spectacular local recreational and economic opportunities to rural communities in western Colorado from Cortez to Grand Junction. It is one of the largest, undeveloped regions in Colorado with 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 prioritizes is providing opportunities for Tribal Members from the Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute Tribes to connect to the DRCC. This includes visiting cultural sites, swimming in the river, and spending time telling stories. We plan to organize

**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 provide leadership for protection work.

It is critical to get the NCA legislation in the south passed with support from Congressman Hurd. 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) pivoted to an NCA discussion as well. We

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 existing establishments or without impacting other industries. 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.

anticipate that a formal proposal will be released by Senator Bennet in 2026. This could lead to an amendment to the southern bill or introduction of a second bill; it could also be passed along to Bennet's successor if he is elected governor.

During this Administration, we have seen unprecedented attacks on public lands, bedrock environmental laws and policies, and management agencies. It is also critical to focus on defense efforts. DRBA is monitoring impacts to the DRCC and the broader region, and mobilizing community members around these issues. We also plan to engage on the Uncompahgre Field Office Resource Management Plan DEIS slated to be released in 2026 by the BLM. We will help lead organizing efforts in the portion of the field office that overlaps with the Dolores landscape.

STRATEGY 1: Provide leadership and Coalition coordination - ongoing

- Host Coalition meetings
- Coordinate Leadership Team - includes DRBA, The Wilderness Society, Conservation Colorado, Conservation Lands Foundation, and Colorado Wildlands Project (@Wilderness Workshop)
- 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, ongoing
- Coordinate/facilitate field trips with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe; Ensure follow-up and communication about the campaign with Ute Tribes and staff; Engage community members in educational opportunities - ongoing
- Support the bi-partisan NCA legislation for the southern part of the landscape (Montezuma, Dolores, San Miguel Counties) 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 (2026) or in the next Congress: Coordinate diverse local NCA Team; Secure 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 by August 2026
- Propel the new NCA discussion forward in the northern landscape (Montrose and Mesa Counties): 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 2026; Existing NCA bill is amended to include the north or a second bill is introduced in this Congress or early in 2027

STRATEGY 3:  
Defend the DRCC from attacks such as mining and oil and gas development, public land selloffs, dismantling of 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 uranium 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  
- Participate in the Uncompahgre Field Office DEIS process advocating for the most conservation-focused alternative and help organize grassroots and grassroots support in the Dolores region, summer 2026 and then ongoing

**Key Decision Makers**

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 support the southern legislation after the primary 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.

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.

**Elevate Voices**

Engaging Indigenous communities in protection efforts for the Dolores is a priority of the Coalition and DRBA. A primary goal in our new strategic plan is to create opportunities for Tribes/Nations/Pueblos with ancestral connections to the Dolores Basin to access and have a voice in conservation efforts in the Dolores Basin.

DRBA will continue to coordinate with the Ute Tribes in the region and engage other Tribes/Nations/Pueblos. We are committed to understanding the myriad Tribal positions on conservation efforts, and to facilitate their participation to the extent and manner deemed appropriate or desirable. DRBA has led multiple field trips for Tribal members with the goal of connecting them to ancestral lands in the DRCC. We continue to maintain relationships, share information, and coordinate opportunities including film screenings and overflights. DRBA coordinated travel for members of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe to listening sessions organized by Colorado Senators. We will continue to provide hands-on and experiential opportunities to get Tribal youth and families out on the landscape to learn and engage in conservation efforts. A recent example of this is an art project with youth and community members from White Mesa that connected youth and community members to the landscape and explored concepts of protecting the landscape through art. This work is culminating in a traveling exhibit across southwestern Colorado and Utah, amplifying cultural ties to the Dolores landscape.

DRBA is leading an ethnography project focused on reconnecting Tribal Nations to the DRCC and incorporating traditional ecological knowledge and stewardship of the land into land management decisions. The first phase of the project, in collaboration with a local ethnographer, BLM and USFS, and several regional Tribes and Pueblos, is ongoing and likely to wrap up in 2026. We are exploring expanding the project in geography and/or the number of Tribes/Pueblos involved.

**Working With Business Community**

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 member companies and hope to continue to do so. In our experience utilizing the compelling economic voice for conservation outcomes is very effective. Specifically, direct engagement with representative Hurd and his staff regarding the southern Dolores NCA bill will be very important in the coming months. Educating employees of member companies in southwest Colorado is also a great way to create more engaged and informed citizens.

**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 has passed, or at least is supported, reintroduced, and advancing; and this bi-partisan NCA legislation plays a positive role in broader lands bill negotiations  
-Process is well underway on an NCA for the northern region leading to either an amendment of the southern legislation or introduction of a second bill  
-The landscape is successfully defended and broad state-wide support for protecting the Dolores is sustained and grown  
-At least three meaningful outreach opportunities or field visits with the Ute Tribes to connect Tribal members with their ancestral lands in the Dolores region are provided

