The 6,614 acre Browns Canyon Wilderness Study Area was surveyed in 1980 and designated in 1993. The Bureau of Land Management’s 27 million acres of National Conservation Lands include Wilderness Areas, National Monuments and Conservation Areas. Mostly in the western U.S., WSA’s are large, undisturbed areas which may be considered candidates for Congressional designation under the 1964 Wilderness Act. Of the 530 current BLM WSA’s, 54 are in Colorado.

At 7,600’ - 9,000’ elevation, the WSA’s smooth granitic outcrops and pitted limestone are markedly different from the glaciated 14,000’ peaks of the Continental Divide across the Arkansas Valley. In the rain shadow and snow shadow of the Divide, the WSA is drier, with sparse snowpack, no permanent streams and few springs. Hardy pinyon and ponderosa pine, juniper, aspen and dense brush survive in dry watercourses. Elk, mule deer and bighorn sheep, and predators such as mountain lion, bobcat, coyote and black bear thrive here, in spite of water scarcity. Wildlife rely on the Arkansas River, just outside WSA boundaries, managed jointly by BLM and the State of Colorado as the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area. The most rafted whitewater river in the US, the Arkansas River is also the state’s premier cold-water fishery, recently designated as Gold Medal Waters.

Little evidence remains of limited mining attempted here c1880–1900. The Cunliffe Mining District to the east spurred construction of the short-lived narrow gauge railroad down Railroad Gulch south of the WSA to transport ore to the Salida smelter via the Denver & Rio Grande RR. No private lands lie within the WSA, although a few private parcels are adjacent. One primitive route, the Turret Trail, and several spur trails traverse the northern section and are open and passable only to foot and horse travel.

You are here! nonmotorized nonmechanized trails open only to hikers, horseback; mountain bikes OK on 1435 ATV trails 50” max width also open to motorcycles, mountain bikes, hikers, horseback system roads open to all vehicles including unlicensed OHVs; also open to mountain bikes, hikers, horseback county roads open to all vehicles including unlicensed OHVs; also open to mountain bikes, hikers, horseback county roads closed to all unlicensed vehicles; open to licensed vehicles; also mountain bikes, hikers, horseback state & federal highways closed to all unlicensed vehicles end of route seasonal closure gates, typically Dec 1 – April 15 campground and picnic site: fee areas trailhead information kiosk, parking no mechanized travel permitted USFS, San Isabel National Forest BLM, Bureau of Land Management State Private U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Enjoy and take care of the WSA! Travel and recreate with minimum impact. Respect the environment and the rights of others. Educate yourself; plan and prepare before you go. Avoid streams, meadows, ponds, muddy roads and trails, steep hillsides, wildlife and livestock. Discover the rewards of responsible recreation. Further information contact BLM Royal Gorge Field Office in Canon City at 719 269.9500 or visit www.blm.gov/co
Browns Canyon WSA Northern Trails

Designated trails in Browns Canyon WSA are accessed from this trailhead. Signing is in place, but these trails may be difficult to follow. The Nathrop USGS topographic map or a GPS device is recommended. Consider taking a digital photograph of this panel’s map to help guide you. Cell phone service is not reliable throughout this system. Review distances and estimated travel times (below) to plan a comfortable, safe trip.

If you have just a few hours, consider going to the river at the mouth of Little Cottonwood Creek. Leave the designated trail before it climbs out of the gulch and follow the dry creek bed to its junction with the river. Please do not trespass on private property north of the mouth or use unsigned trails. Do not return to the trailhead via the river — this is private land.

If you choose to hike on either 6045A or 6045B be aware that there is no connecting trail along the river and going off-trail is not recommended due to steep and rocky terrain.

Turret Trail to FR184 or Catkin Gulch Loop are beautiful but strenuous 11-mile hikes. These should be attempted with adequate preparation and confidence in all hikers’ fitness. See sidebar for specifics.

Route distances and estimated hiking times
Round trip in river at Little Cottonwood via 6045 2.7 miles, 2 hrs
Round trip to the river on 6045A 5.5 miles, 3 hrs
Round trip to the river on 6045B 3 miles, 4.5 hrs
Round trip including Catkin Gulch Loop 11.5 miles, 5 hrs
Round trip RTM TH in WSA boundary/FR184 11 miles, 5 hrs
Add ample time for stops on each route.

Enjoy and protect the Browns Canyon Wilderness Study Area!

- Mid-summer travel can be very hot — plan time and distance accordingly.
- Take plenty of water, adequate food, warm clothing and rain gear.
- Stay on designated trails unless confident of cross country hiking and navigational skills.
- Pack out all trash and dispose of human waste properly.
- Enjoy wildlife from a distance — never feed them.
- Rattlesnakes have been seen — be aware.

*Topographic map or GPS recommended.

Consider taking a digital photo of this panel’s map.
- Dogs must be under control.
- Download a GPS-compatible map to a smartphone at www.browncanyon.org/map or www.fs.fed.us/r14/landrendof.jpg (internet connection required)

Accessibility: Brewers Canyon WSA (CR 301)

1. Arkansas River to the shore
2. Hiking, bird watching
3. No motorized or mechanized travel permitted
4. San Isabel National Forest
5. USFS, United States Forest Service
6. BLM, Bureau of Land Management
7. Browns Canyon Wilderness Study Area
8. State Trust/Wildlife Management Area
9. No mechanized travel permitted
10. Nonmotorized trails open to hikers and horseback ATV trails 50" max width open to motorcycles, mountain bikes, hikers, horseback
11. Open to all vehicles including unlicensed DHM on road.
12. Open to motorized and nonmotorized DHM, motorcycles, hikers, horseback
13. Open to all vehicles including unlicensed DHM
14. Open to all vehicles including unlicensed DHM on road.
15. End of route 300C.

The Turret Trail 6045 on mute to the Arkansas River at Little Cottonwood Creek is a steep but short 2-mile round trip introduction to the WSA with wide views of its northern half.

The 5.5-mile "in and out" hike along the gentle dead-end River Bench Trail 6045A provides a good sample of the northern WSA with an Arkansas River overview.

The 11.5-mile Catkin Gulch Loop 6046 round trip via the Turret Trail 6045 gives deep into the WSA for a fuller experience of its wilderness character.

You are here!