Rio Grande Basin Roundtable map showing boating access points along the Rio Grande: Rio Grande Reservoir Hand Launch, Thirty Mile Bridge Gage, Mouth of Box Canyon Ramp (~8.4 miles), ~17.2 miles, Fisherman's Ramp (Rio Grande Campground) ~4.9 miles, Marshall Park (Sevenmile Bridge) Ramp ~7.2 miles, Deep Creek Ramp, CPW Fish Hatchery Ramp, Creede, Wagon Wheel Gap Ramp ~8.8 miles, Wagon Wheel Gap Gage ~1.7 miles, Blue Creek ~5.2. Counties: Hinsdale, Mineral. Roads: FS Rd 520, Co Rd 30, 149, FS Rd 529.
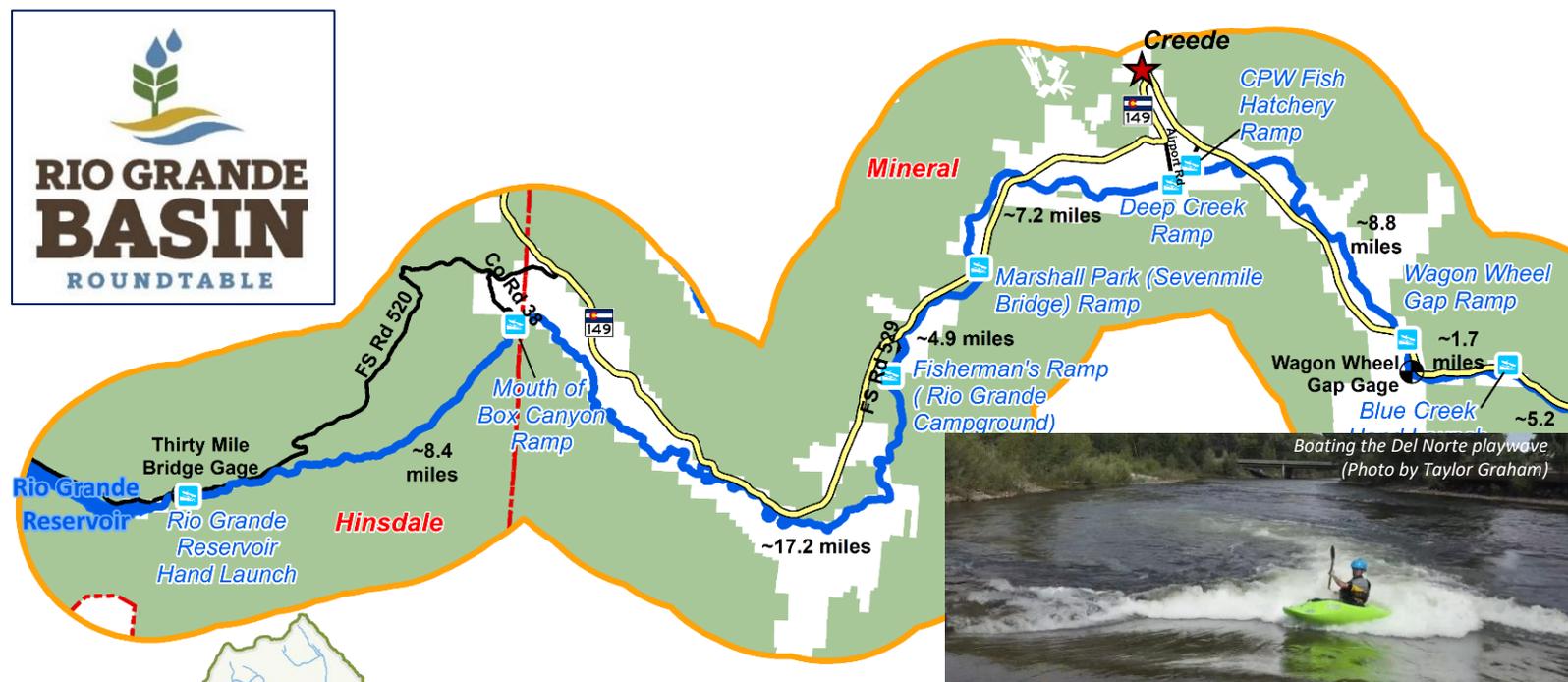
Boating the Del Norte playwave
(Photo by Taylor Graham)

Recreational Boating 101

RECREATIONAL BOATING OVERVIEW

The Rio Grande Basin boasts excellent water–based recreation activities, and boating is particularly popular. Many recreators enjoy "float fishing" on lakes and rivers while others seek out whitewater boating opportunities. No matter what type of craft floats your boat, there is sure to be a time and place to use it in this Basin!

RIVER ACCESS & WHERE TO BOAT

The Rio Grande mainstem features several boating segments from Rio Grande Reservoir to the New Mexico state line (and beyond). From the Texas Creek ramp to the Town of Del Norte you will find world class float fishing and some class II and III rapids. The Box Canyon below Rio Grande Reservoir offers more technical whitewater boating. For leisurely inner tubing, check out Coller State Wildlife Area. Click link on right to view a boating map of the Upper Rio Grande.

Note: the Rio Grande from Del Norte to the City of Alamosa is not navigable due to lack of public access and hazardous instream structures.

WHEN TO BOAT?

The boating season can vary depending on streamflows, weather, and preference, but generally lasts from April through October. Some people prefer to boat when flows are high for an exciting technical trip, while others prefer lower flows. Keep an eye on stream gages (see links on right) to plan *when* and *where* to boat!

Another useful resource is the Rio Grande & Conejos River Boatable Days Study, available on American Whitewater's website. This study, and others like it around the state, quantified the number of "boatable" days on several segments of each river, utilizing streamflow preference data provided by boaters familiar with the rivers.

WHEN TO BOAT? – CONTINUED

Note: Boating is not permitted from Lobatos Bridge to Lee Trail (New Mexico) from April 1st to May 31st to protect sensitive wildlife breeding areas, including nesting raptors.

LAKES AND RESERVOIRS

Lakes and reservoirs also offer unique recreational opportunities. From remote, high mountain lakes to reservoirs accessible by vehicle and outfitted with boat ramps and handicap amenities, you'll be sure to find water suitable for your style. While some lakes/reservoirs, such as Smith Reservoir and Continental Reservoir, allow motorized boats, others do not.

SAFETY

Safety always comes first on the water. Please remember to always wear a life jacket and research your boating destination ahead of time. Low bridges, low head dams (LHDs), fences, and other navigational hazards pose a risk to boaters. These hazards are not always shown on maps and can be difficult to spot.

A variety of groups around the state, including the Department of Natural Resources, is working to map hazards and improve safety. However, it is important to know where hazards exist and plan accordingly.

AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES

Aquatic species such as mussels, fish, and aquatic plants, can be transported between waterbodies via boats, vehicles, and clothing, especially wading gear. To prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species (ANS), it is important to inspect and disinfect your equipment and watercraft before traveling. Motorboats and sailboats must have an ANS Stamp prior to launching in Colorado waters.

Useful Links
- Rafting Map – Upper Rio Grande
- Rio Grande & Conejos River Boatable Days Study
- American Whitewater Reach Description – Wagon Wheel Gap
- Colorado Low Head Dam Safety Initiative
- Aquatic Nuisance Species (CPW)

Stream Gages

Rio Grande:
- Rio Grande Below Rio Grande Reservoir
- Rio Grande at Wagon Wheel Gap
- Rio Grande Near Del Norte
- Rio Grande at Alamosa
- Rio Grande Near Lobatos
- Rio Grande Near Los Sauses

Conejos River:
- Conejos Below Platoro
- Conejos Near Mogote

Other:
- South Fork Rio Grande Near South Fork

Reservoirs/Lakes with Ramps:
- Big Meadows Reservoir
- Beaver Creek Reservoir
- Continental Reservoir
- Platoro Reservoir
- Rio Grande Reservoir
- Smith Reservoir
- Sanchez Reservoir