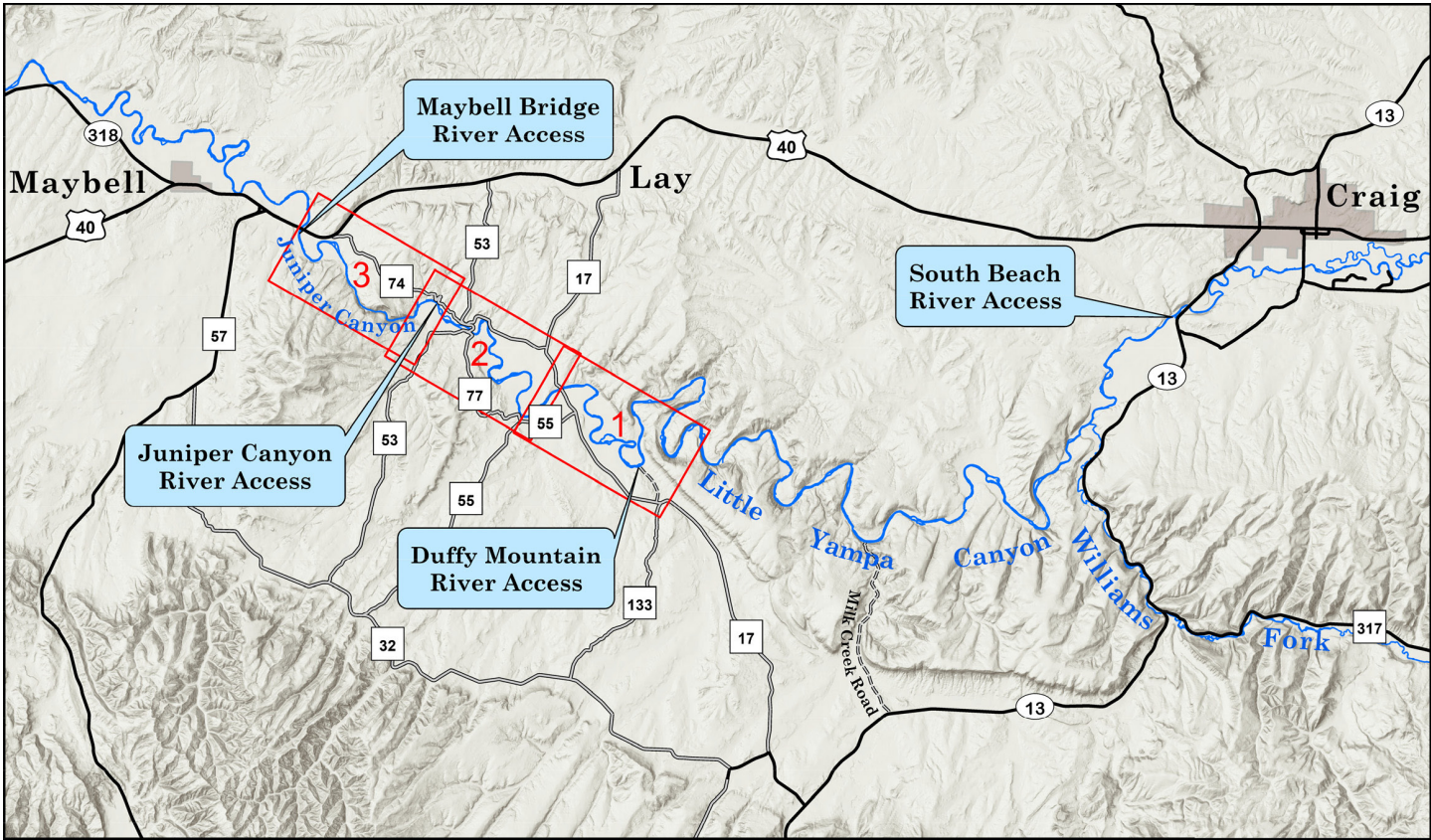


YAMPA RIVER GUIDES

JUNIPER CANYON



JUNIPER CANYON LEGEND

HYDROGRAPHIC FEATURES

- Stream or Mainstem Ditch
- Intermittent Stream
- Branch Ditch
- Irrigation Pipe or Culvert
- Irrigation Pump
- Center-Pivot Irrigation
- River Mile

ROADS AND STRUCTURES

- Trail or Closed 4WD
- 4WD
- Graded Road
- Paved Road
- Power Line
- Buildings

ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES

- Bureau of Land Management
- BLM Special Management
- Yampa River State Park

ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

- Active or Prehistoric Floodplain
- Riparian Herbaceous/Short Shrub
- Riparian Tree/Tall Shrub Canopy
- Upland Tree/Shrub Cover
- Fluvial Sand or Gravel
- Gravel Quarry

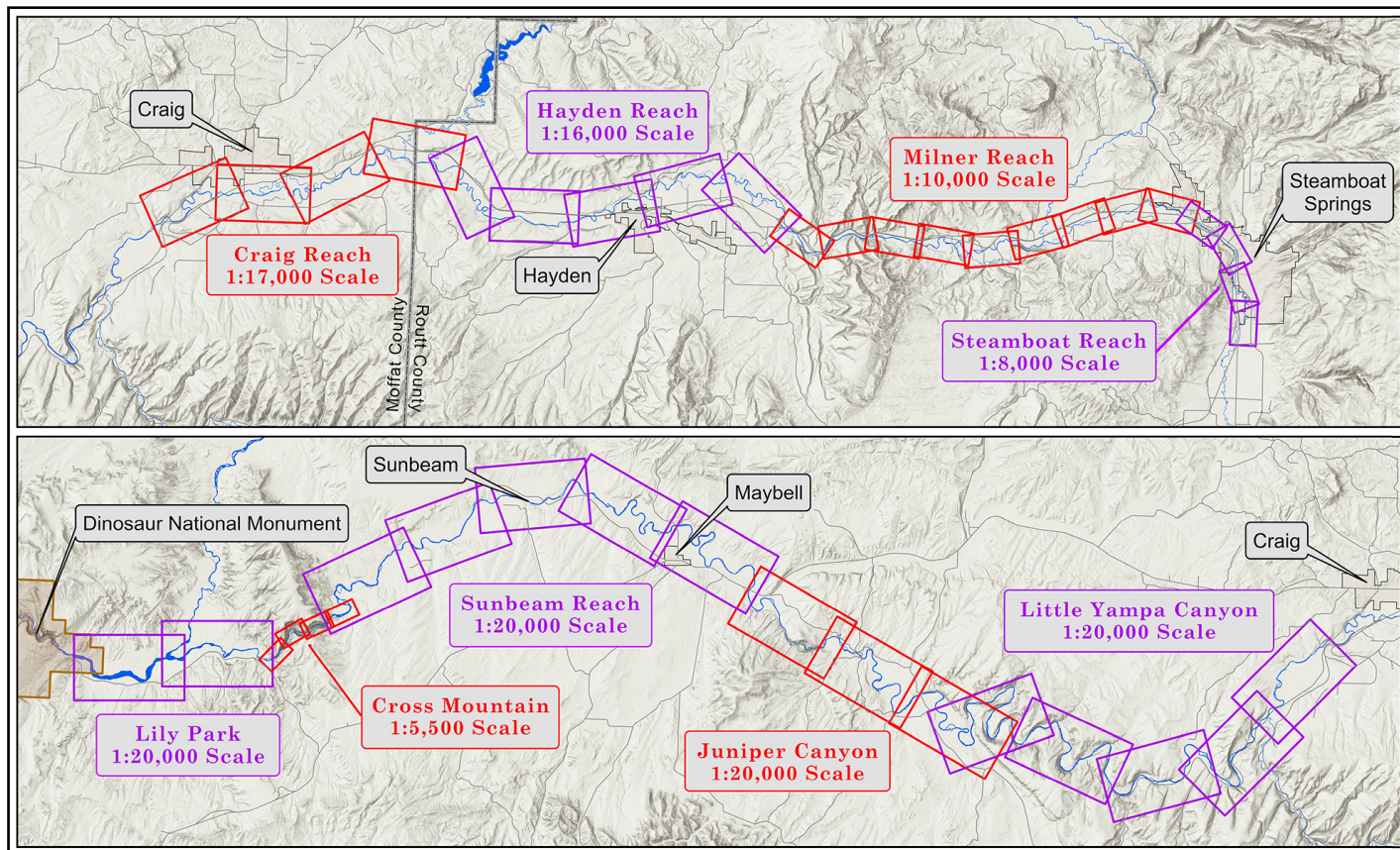
RECREATIONAL AREA SYMBOLS

- Fee Area
- Trailer Access
- Picnic Tables
- Rest Rooms
- Longterm Parking
- Designated Camping
- No Camping

YAMPA RIVER GUIDES

Yampa River Guides are a FREE, downloadable series of map guides in PDF format, designed for recreational users of the Yampa River. When the entire series is completed they will cover approximately 158 miles of river, from the Chuck Lewis State Wildlife Area upstream of Steamboat Springs to the Deerlodge Park boat ramp on the eastern boundary of Dinosaur National Monument.

The Yampa River Guide Series



How to Download and Print Your Guides

Go to <https://guides.wildyampa.com> to download the most recent versions of the Yampa River Guides. Every attempt will be made to keep these guides up-to-date as boater access and river conditions evolve in the future. You can check the version date of your download at the bottom of the front cover and on each map page.

PRINTING ON LEGAL PAPER

Ideally, your Yampa River Guide should be printed on legal-size paper, using a duplex (prints to both sides) printer. Whether you can print to both sides of the paper or not, be sure to select the “ACTUAL SIZE” option in the print wizard (this keeps the printer software from adding an extra margin to the printed page).

Duplexed pages will lay out like a book, with each map page on the right and its corresponding text page facing it on the left. Your pages can then be stapled, or laminated and spiral bound for a more durable guide. You might also consider printing on waterproof paper.

PRINTING ON LETTER PAPER

Yampa River Guides can also be printed successfully on letter-size paper—the maps and print will just appear smaller. When printing on letter-size paper, be sure to select the “FIT” or “FIT TO PAGE” option in the print wizard.

Help Keep These Guides Accurate

The Yampa River is always in a state of flux, so over time even the best map is destined to become inaccurate. Legal river access for boaters is also a moving target. And of course, the author of this guide makes no claim to infallibility. If you discover errors or have suggestions for improvement, please E-mail Pete@wildyampa.com with “Yampa River Guides” in the subject line. Or just let me know if you are finding these guides helpful!

Terms of Use

The Yampa River Guides are FREE to download and print for personal recreational use. Any other reproduction or publication of these guides, or any portions thereof, is strictly prohibited.

If someone is charging you for the contents of this guide, they are in copyright violation.

Maps, text and uncredited photographs © Peter A. Williams

About The Maps

As has become the convention with river guides, the Yampa River Guide maps and their accompanying text are laid out with the river running from the **bottom to the top** of the page.

The river channels and environmental features depicted on these maps were originally drawn directly on top of the 2019 National Agricultural Imagery Program (NAIP) **aircraft overflight photography**. However, since 2019 there have been several significant changes in the river channels, and more should be expected in the future. Yampa River Guide maps are regularly revised as the river evolves, using as reference the most recently available photography. NAIP offers superior resolution and detail, but is only updated every two or three years (most recently 2023). During the interim, the online version of Copernicus/Sentinel-2 satellite photography, although much lower in resolution, is conveniently updated weekly.

An aerial photograph, or the map drawn from it, can only capture a dynamic, seasonally evolving river in one moment of time. These maps depict the river during a period of low flows, when the river channels are filled with **exposed sand and gravel bars**. Higher flows in the spring will inundate many of these features, and normally dry backwater channels may even be floatable under those conditions. Conversely, it is assumed that during lower flows boaters will appreciate having some idea of where the sand and gravel is likely to emerge.

The **river miles** (RM) depicted on these maps are measured upstream from the confluence of the Yampa and Green rivers at Echo Park, in Dinosaur National Monument. They were created specifically for these maps, and follow a line up the center of the main river channel as it existed in the fall of 2019. Note that there has never been a formal, “official” set of designated river miles for the Yampa River. River miles depicted on maps elsewhere have typically been based on long out-of-date hydrographic data, and can vary from the Yampa River Guide maps by as much as a mile or more.

Private Property

Private property boundaries are not represented on any of these maps. The only property boundaries depicted in the Yampa River Guides are for publicly owned (or publically leased) properties that specifically allow for public boating access. ***Everywhere else should be treated as off limits to or from watercraft traveling the Yampa River.***

Under Colorado law, ownership of the river bank does not stop at the high water line. While the water and fish may belong to someone else, the **river bottom is the property of the abutting landowners**. Under these circumstances, standing on the river bottom, even in moving water, is trespassing. This can especially be a problem once river flows drop enough to require dragging your craft over obstacles. Please avoid floating the Yampa River when and where such conditions exist.

Much of the Yampa River from Steamboat Springs to Dinosaur National Monument flows through private land. Please help us stay on good terms with our private landowning neighbors, so boaters can continue to float the Yampa River without further restrictions in the future. Always stay in your boat when floating through private property.

Safety

The Yampa River Guides are intended for use as a general resource for boaters. ***They are not a substitute for staying alert to hazards and practicing good boating skills.*** Rivers are dynamic environments, and conditions can change dramatically as water levels rise and fall.

With the exception of the Cross Mountain and Juniper canyons, experienced boaters will find the “whitewater” character of the portions of the Yampa River covered by the Yampa River Guides to be mild. Nevertheless, natural hazards such as strainers or entrained wood may still be encountered. Human-made structures, especially bridges and diversion structures, can also create significant hazards to boaters. The most notorious (but certainly not all) of these structural hazards have been identified on the maps with **red-bordered labels**. When you see these labels, pay close attention to the “**Hazard!**” description in the accompanying text.

Always come prepared for the unexpected. Pay attention, and always keep an eye out downstream. Proper personal equipment should always include a PFD (Personal Flotation Device), appropriate footwear, and sunscreen. And, although much of the Yampa is flatwater, the knowledge gained from a swiftwater rescue course might one day help you save a life, even in downtown Steamboat Springs. In Cross Mountain and Juniper canyons such knowledge is essential.

Ultimately YOU are responsible for your own and your companions’ safety.

Disclaimer

The author and distributors of the Yampa River Guides are not responsible for trespass, property damage, personal injury, or death resulting from activities involving anyone using or possessing these river guides.

Juniper Canyon Map 1

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.

RM 101.3 **Maudlin Gulch** is named for Zene Maudlin, who ranched in partnership with Ed Hodges in the 1890s. (Hodges also managed the K Diamond Ranch). The Hodges & Maudlin ranch headquarters was located about 7 miles up the gulch from the river.

RM 102.1 The present **Government Bridge** is the third generation of bridges built in this spot. Its name derives from the original wooden timber bridge, built by U.S. Army engineers in the winter of 1880–1. During the expulsion of the Utes from Colorado, in the aftermath of the 1879 Battle of Milk Creek and the violence at the White River Indian Agency, the Army needed a reliable route connecting the troops garrisoned in the White River Valley with the nearest military post (Fort Steele, near Rawlins, Wyoming).

As the first bridge to be built over the Yampa, the Government Bridge eliminated the need to ford the river (which was impossible during spring flooding), and so it immediately became a key link in Northwest Colorado's road network. By the time the federal troops evacuated their garrison, in late 1883, the bridge had already become integral to travel between Meeker and the railroad at Rawlins. Commercial stage traffic also began along the route in 1881.

In 1884, the Ward family homesteaded by the bridge, building a dirt-roofed log house with a barn. To take full advantage of their location, they also began operating a roadhouse business, supplying passing travelers with food, lodging, and liquor. While the liquor added to the family's local reputation for immoral behavior, it would be the violence of their deaths that fully propelled them into the popular annals of western lore.

The first of the "**Tragic Wards**" to go was Joe Ward, the notoriously querulous father, whose past included two homicides. After it was learned that he was stealing horses from his new neighbors (and selling them in Rawlins), he soon met his own end from a vigilante posse.

Sometime after Joe's murder, daughter Etta Ward left home to find a more exciting life in the mining town of Leadville. The early 1890s found her in Colorado Springs, where she committed suicide by tying a bedsheet around her neck and jumping out a window.

Son Clover Ward was the most respected of the clan, and by 30 years of age he had earned a reputation as an industrious worker. In May of 1900, while riding a bicycle home across the bridge, a loose plank pitched him off into the river. It was supposed that his heavy irrigation boots must have filled, pulling him under as he attempted to swim to shore. His body wasn't found until nearly a month later, about 50 miles downstream in Lily Park.

Whether prompted by Clover's fate or not, less than three months later two county commissioners made a personal inspection of the now quite rickety bridge. It was soon decided that it should be replaced with a new steel-truss structure. Construction began that fall and was still underway when the final end came for Hattie, the last of the Wards. After Clover's death, the grief-stricken mother had talked of selling out and returning to her family's home in Indiana, but in December she was still living alone at the homestead. Sometime very late in the evening of Christmas Day the house caught fire. A later inquest found that Hattie was likely trying to put water on the fire when the dirt roof collapsed on her, and she was, as the *Craig Courier* graphically proclaimed, "cremated." Her remains were buried near the stone marker she had so recently placed over her husband and son's graves, just upstream of the bridge.

The new bridge was finally completed early in 1901, and it would last through another seventy years before it, too, needed replacement with the modern girder bridge you see today.

RM 106.25 The long, circling bend you have been traveling has brought the river back nearly to a point it passed roughly two miles upstream, but which is now less than 250 feet away.

RM 107.3 The Juniper Canyon reach begins at the **Duffy Mountain river access**.

Morgan Gulch was named for the Morgan Ranch, established by Dave Morgan in the late 1870s. The headquarters was located about 8 miles up the gulch from the river.

The **Juniper Mountain Ditch** distributes water from the Duffy Tunnel (see the story of the tunnel in the [Little Yampa Canyon Guide](#)). Confusingly, the adjudicated name for the water right is actually the "Juniper Mountain Tunnel & Irrigation Ditch" (though the tunnel has always gone by Duffy's name). The Juniper Mountain title derives from the location of the lands irrigated by the ditch, which were described as being upstream of Juniper Mountain.

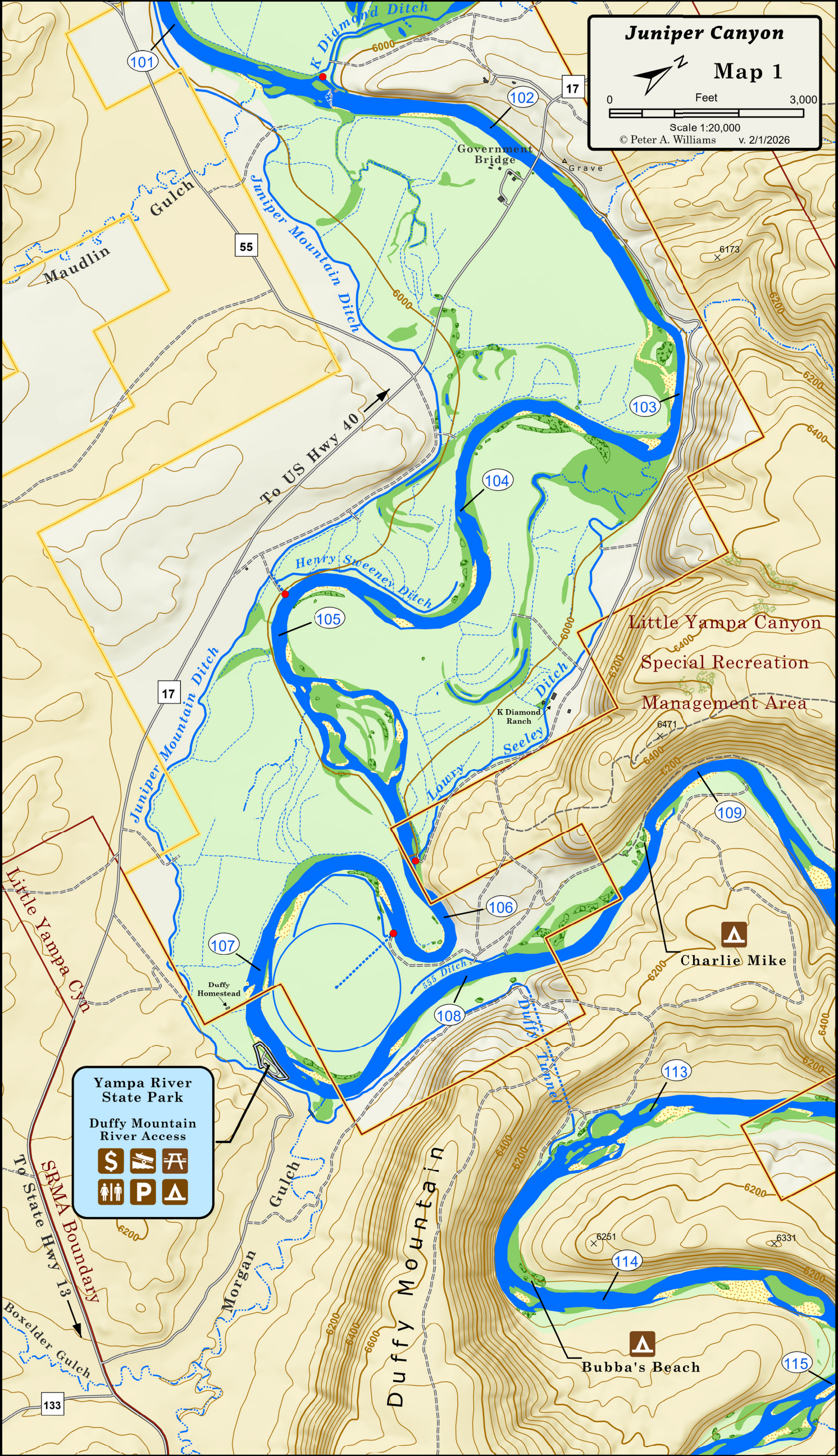
Information courtesy:

Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library

Babcock, Harold R. *Historic Highlights of Moffat County and Surrounding Areas* (1996)

FitzPatrick, V. S. "The Tragic Wards" (1966)

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Juniper Canyon

Map 1



Scale 1:20,000
© Peter A. Williams v. 2/1/2026

Yampa River State Park

Duffy Mountain River Access



**Little Yampa Canyon
Special Recreation
Management Area**

Charlie Mike

Bubba's Beach

Juniper Canyon Map 2

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.

RM 94.75 The Yampa River State Park's **Juniper Canyon river access** is on river right. Boaters who want to skip the flatwater through Axial Basin can put on the river here for the whitewater run through Juniper Canyon.

RM 95.75 The **Juniper Hot Springs** are located above the floodplain on river left. The hot springs were well known to the Utes, but first "discovered" by white settlers in the late 1870s. A small dirt-roofed log structure was built over the springs in the mid-1880s. In May, 1900, the *Craig Courier* reported that "the reputation of Juniper hot springs is known far and wide for their curative properties and every summer and fall a great many people visit them." The paper went on to urge that citizens petition for the construction of a "comfortable bathhouse."

In 1905, Minerva Wing took over ownership of the property and began the first substantial development, constructing a general store, post office, hotel, and dining room. In 1922 her daughter, Minnie, added another four furnished cottages and completed the outside swimming pool. By 1930 she had also installed a small electrical plant for powering the lights.

Stella Craig and her husband purchased the property in 1962, and Stella ran it for another 31 years. When she retired, the springs were closed to the public. Investors purchased the property in 2007, with plans to redevelop the facilities. Today all the buildings are gone and nothing has been rebuilt, but for now the pools are once again open to the public.

RM 95.9 The first **Juniper Springs Bridge** was actually the original Fraker Ford bridge, built across the Yampa River three miles east of Maybell in 1907. Until the bridge was moved to Juniper Springs in 1932, a small hand-operated trolley provided the only dry crossing of the river at this location. The remains of the trolley towers are still present upstream of the modern bridge, which was built in the late 1980s.

The Historic K Diamond Ranch

From just downstream of the Charlie Mike river camp, to nearly the Juniper Hot Springs, much of the bottomland along the river at one time belonged to the historic **K Diamond Ranch**. In the early 1890s, entrepreneur William Church (who had made his fortune mining silver and copper) began to turn his interests to ranching. Church soon owned large tracts of land in both northeast and northwest Colorado, including over a thousand acres along the Yampa River in the Axial Basin. An absentee landowner, Church hired local Maybell rancher Ed Hodges to manage all of his ranch properties across the state.

The original K Diamond Ranch began unraveling after Church died unexpectedly at his Denver home in 1901. Hodges stayed on to manage the K Diamond for Church's heirs, but five years later he also died, of cancer, at age 46—just as the work on the Duffy Tunnel (1904–1910) was getting underway. The Church estate continued to finance much of the tunnel construction after Hodges' death, and it even purchased a few more local properties (including Clover Ward's), but it appears the heirs were beginning to lose interest in the ranch. All of the K Diamond livestock was sold to the Cary brothers (of the Cary Ranch outside Hayden) in 1911.

Then, in 1917, the K Diamond was split in two, with Patrick Sweeney purchasing the "lower" K Diamond. Sweeney was of the first generation of Axial Basin ranchers, with an established ranch in the foothills of the Danforth Hills, but he still needed the irrigated fields to grow more hay for wintertime feeding. Patrick's sons continued to expand the Sweeney holdings, until their properties included large tracts on the south side of the river (across from the "upper" K Diamond) and on both sides below Government Bridge. By the mid-1920s these also included the old Duffy Ranch. Today the Sweeney family ownership is long gone, but their lands along the river are still collectively held as a single investment property called the "Sweeney River Ranch."

Meanwhile, the Church estate disposed of the last of the remaining "upper" K Diamond lands in 1918. Within a year the property changed hands again, and then once again in 1925. For a period of time at midcentury the ranch was owned by Dave Seeley, and then by his son, Lowry Seeley (the Lowry Seeley Ditch water right was granted in 1961). Later, ownership passed through the Culverwells, first Glendon and then son Gerald, who continued to grow the the ranch holdings beyond the original river bottomlands. Gerald sold the ranch to the present owners, Tom and Donna Deakins, in 1992. Their son, Cody, manages the K Diamond operations, keeping the traditional ranch name alive today.

Information courtesy:

Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library

Olsen, Dan. "A Diamond in the Rough," *Craig Press*, September 30, 2006.

Craig, Stella, et al. *Stella Craig at Juniper Hot Springs* (2009)

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Juniper Canyon

Map 2

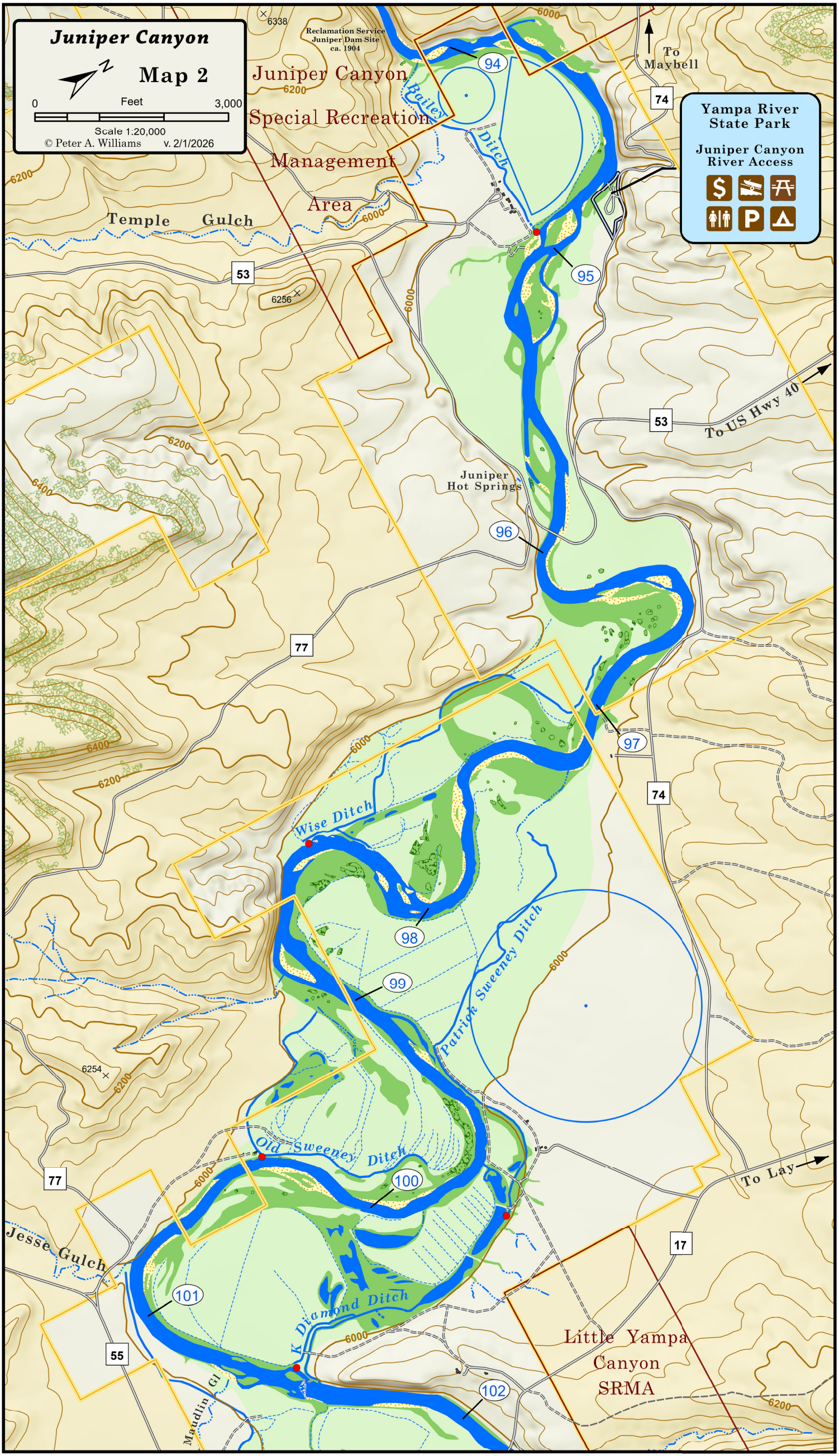


Scale 1:20,000
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**Juniper Canyon
Special Recreation
Management
Area**

**Yampa River
State Park**

**Juniper Canyon
River Access**



Juniper Canyon Map 3

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.

- RM 88.7 The Juniper Canyon reach ends at the Yampa River State Park's **Maybell Bridge river access**. Look for the boat ramp on river right just upstream of the bridge.
- RM 92 The **Maybell Ditch Flume** crosses the river here. The flume itself was replaced in 1964, but the stonework in the abutments and retaining walls dates from the early 1900s.
- RM 93 **HAZARD!** The Maybell Ditch rapid makes for a fun whitewater run, but care should be taken to **avoid entering the intake channel** on far river right. Once in, escaping out again may be a very rough ride. It is not too difficult to hold back and "read and run" this rapid, but if you choose to scout it, the usual plan is to pull over to the river right shore well above the rapid (but below where the river bends right) and then hike downstream.



Running the "new" rapid at about 7,400 cfs in 2024, the first spring after project completion.

- RM 93.75 In 1904 The Reclamation Service (precursor to the Bureau of Reclamation) drilled test holes in this area, to determine the bedrock conditions for a **potential Juniper Dam**. By 1980, when the Colorado River Water Conservation District applied for a license to build their Juniper Dam, the potential dam site had been moved downstream about 1.25 miles.
- RM 94.75 The Yampa River State Park's **Juniper Canyon river access** is on river right. This is the put-in for boaters who just want to run the Juniper Canyon whitewater stretch. The fast ride through the canyon (roughly 1.5 hours) and short shuttle (about 4.3 miles via County Road 74) make it possible for industrious boaters to do multiple runs in a day.

The Maybell Ditch

The Maybell Ditch and the town of Maybell are inextricably tied together in history. In 1899, the Maybell Canal Company organized the sale of 2,000 acres of Colorado State Land Board property to a group of families recruited from Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, and Kansas. In exchange for the right to purchase homesteads in the new community, these pioneer citizens agreed to immediately commence work on a canal "large enough to water the entire valley." They were also required to purchase stock in the Maybell Irrigation District, providing the initial capital for the ditch construction. At first projected to take just three years, the ditch proved to be a much larger undertaking, and was not fully completed for two decades.

After more than a hundred years of operation, the aging, leaky diversion section of the ditch in Juniper Canyon was due for a major renovation. The Maybell Irrigation District, The Nature Conservancy, and the Friends of the Yampa collaborated to develop a comprehensive "rehabilitation and modernization" plan for a substantially improved diversion. The iron hand-operated headgates were replaced with a state-of-the-art solar-powered headgate structure, remotely operated in concert with multiple flow-adjusting gates between the headgate and the flume downstream. Water monitors now contribute data that allow fine-tuning the operation, making for a more efficient delivery of irrigation water. The old diversion dam was replaced with a new compact rock berm, and boulder enhancements were added along river left for fish on their travels upstream, while a great ride down a center wave train was created for boaters.

Information courtesy (click on the web links!):

Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library

Reed, C.A., et al. "*The Maybell Canal*," [ArcGIS StoryMap](#), (NRCS 2023)

JHL Constructors, [Maybell Diversion Restoration](#) (construction photos)

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Juniper Canyon

Map 3



0 Feet 3,000

Scale 1:20,000

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Stream Gauge
USGS 09251000

Yampa River State Park
Maybell Bridge
River Access



Colorado River Water
Conservation District
Juniper Dam Site
ca. 1980

Little Juniper
Mountain
X 6654

Special Recreation

Diversion
Structure

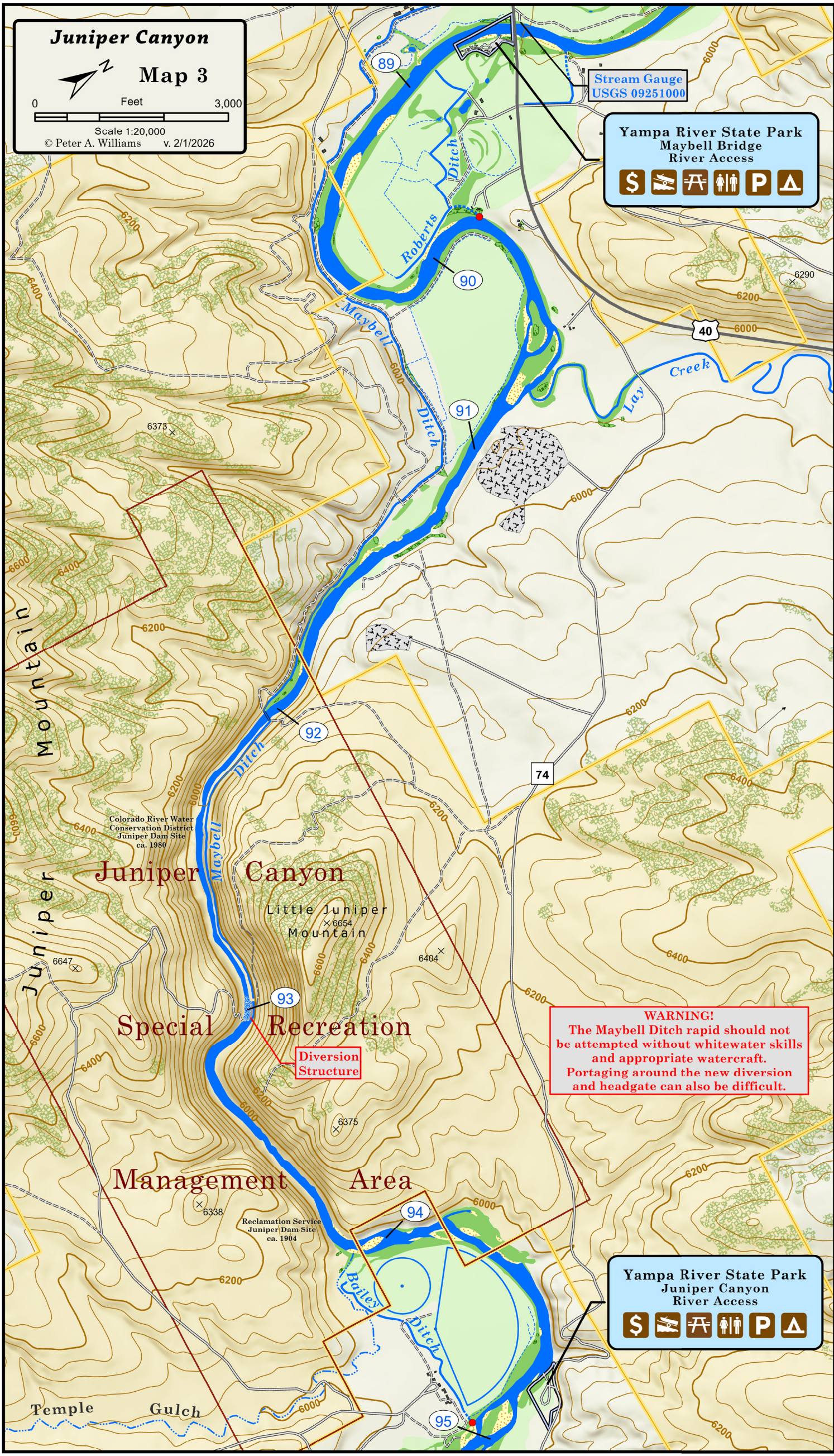
Management Area

Reclamation Service
Juniper Dam Site
ca. 1904

Yampa River State Park
Juniper Canyon
River Access



WARNING!
The Maybell Ditch rapid should not
be attempted without whitewater skills
and appropriate watercraft.
Portaging around the new diversion
and headgate can also be difficult.



THE BACK PAGE

Juniper Canyon Stream Gauge

RM 88.7 **USGS #09251000** Yampa River near Maybell

The **Yampa River near Maybell** gauge is located just downstream of the takeout at the Yampa River State Park Maybell Bridge campground and river access. It provides the best information for the flows you will be riding on your trip through Juniper Canyon.

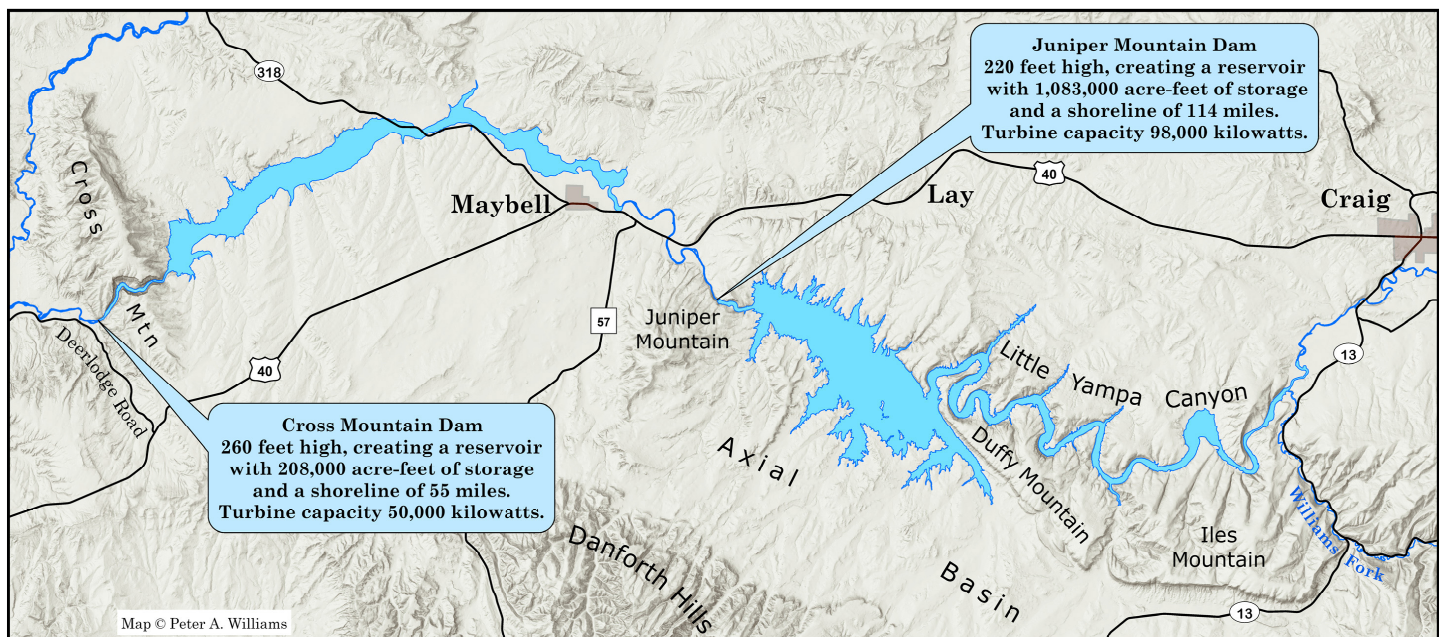
Additional information and flow recommendations for the Juniper Canyon run can also be found at <https://friendsoftheyampa.com/know-before-you-go-juniper-canyon/>.

The Juniper–Cross Mountain Project

The potential for dams at the Juniper and Cross Mountain canyons was first studied over a hundred years ago. Test holes to determine the bedrock conditions were drilled at the head of Juniper Canyon by the Reclamation Service (precursor to the Bureau of Reclamation) in 1904, and Cross Mountain was granted a federal power withdrawal in 1910. By the late 1960s, the Bureau of Reclamation was planning to build a large dam at Juniper as part of the Colorado River Storage Project. But by the mid-1970s various economic and environmental complications (including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s proposal to list the Yampa River as critical habitat for endangered fish) were contributing to substantial delays in the Bureau’s plans.

At that point, the Colorado River Water Conservation District (CRWCD) took over the reins. The CRWCD (created by state law in 1937 to represent the water interests of 15 Colorado Western Slope counties) already held the conditional water rights for both reservoirs, and on January 31, 1980, it applied for a license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to construct the Juniper–Cross Mountain Project. Both dams would generate electric power, with the Cross Mountain dam operated to “re-regulate” (smooth out) the widely variable, “on demand” releases from the Juniper power plant. Irrigation was also a large component of the project, and promotional materials emphasized the recreational value of the reservoirs.

To finance the required license application studies, dam construction, and then the eventual operation and maintenance costs, the CRWCD cut a deal with the Colorado-Ute Electric Association (at the time, the power supplier to 13 rural electrical cooperatives in western and southern Colorado). While the CRWCD would retain ownership of the dams and the irrigation water, Colorado-Ute would cover costs and use the power for its own revenue stream.



The proposed Juniper–Cross Mountain Project reservoirs, ca. 1980.

At first, the expectation was for a rapid completion of the permit process, but as the environmental costs became better understood, the FERC began to raise more concerns—and delays. Then came the big bust of the energy boom in the early 1980s, when the huge oil shale industry in western Colorado collapsed almost overnight. Colorado-Ute got cold feet, pulling out of the project in early 1982. The CRWCD persisted, but as time went on the project’s momentum was lost. The FERC rejected the original application in 1987, although the CRWCD reapplied the following year. In the late 1980s the Colorado Department of Natural Resources was also offering to purchase some of the reservoir water rights to protect the fish, but the CRWCD rejected these overtures, still hopeful that at least a Juniper dam might be built. It was not to be. The cost of the project—and its potential impact on the endangered native fish—ultimately led to its demise.

Information courtesy:

Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library

CRWCD, *Juniper–Cross Mountain Hydroelectric: Summary, Preliminary Project Report* (1980)

Woolley, Ralf R. *The Green River and its Utilization: USGS Water Supply Paper 618* (1930)