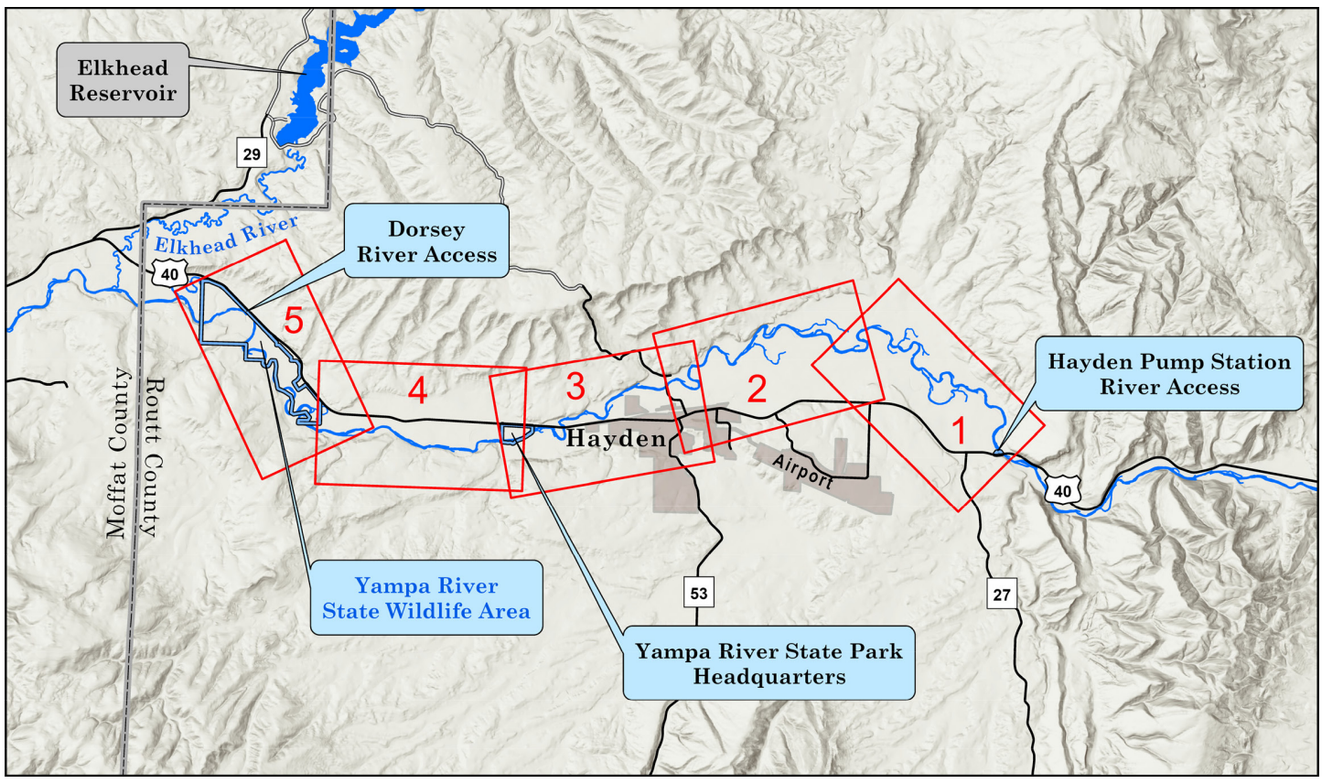
YAMPA RIVER GUIDES

Hayden Reach



Hayden Reach Legend

Hydrographic Features

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

Roads and Structures

- Trail or Closed 4WD
- 4WD
- Graded Road
- Paved Road
- Railroad
- Power Line
- Building

Administrative Boundaries

- Yampa River State Park
- Yampa River State Wildlife Area

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

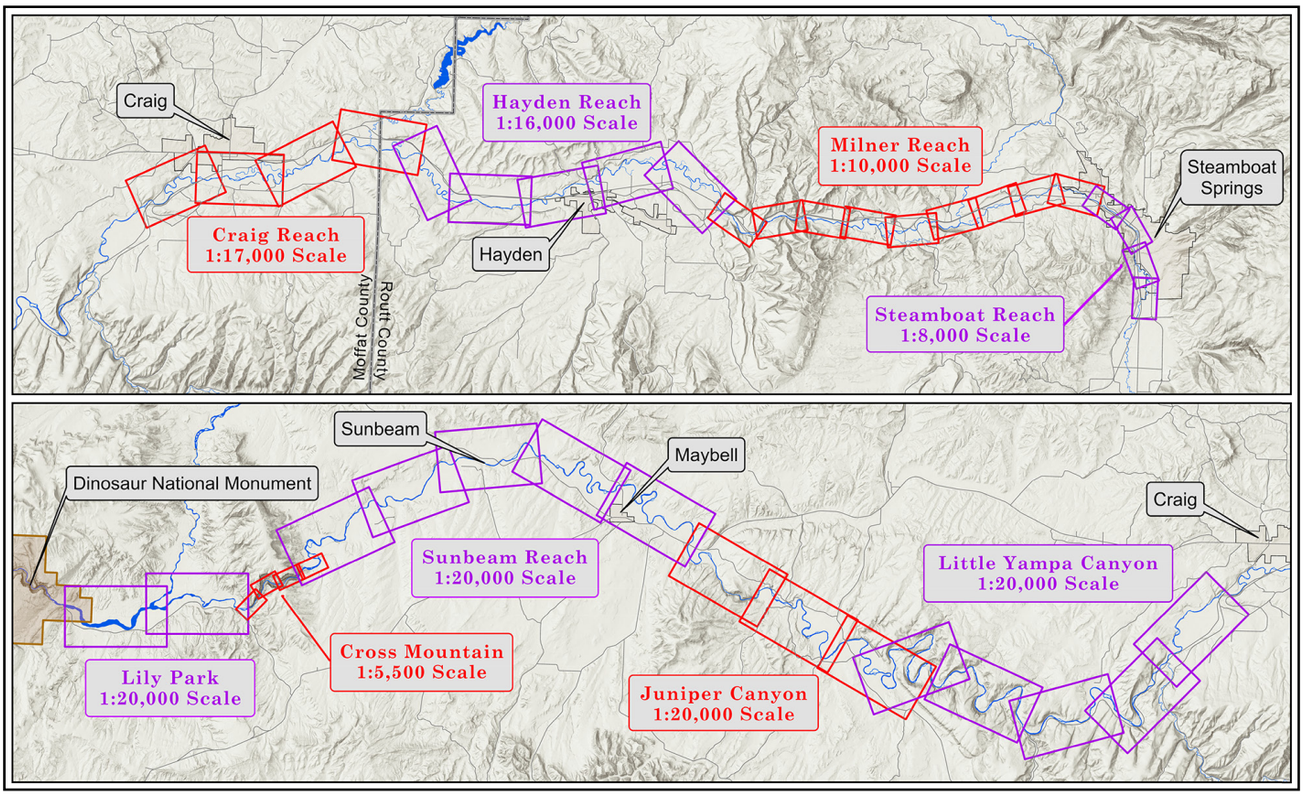
- Fee Area
- Information Kiosk
- Picnic Tables
- Rest Rooms
- Potable Water
- Showers
- Laundry Facilities
- RV Camping
- RV Dump Station
- Designated Camping
- No Camping
- Longterm Parking
- Trailered Craft Access

Version Date August 7, 2026

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

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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 publicly 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.

Hayden Reach Map 1

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

RM 173.5 **Goose Creek** enters the Yampa on river right, followed by **Morgan Creek** immediately downstream. At one time Goose Creek was named Oscar Creek, for Oscar Elmer, who homesteaded along its banks in 1884. Oscar and his wife Kate lived there over a decade before his death. The Goose Creek name began to appear on maps sometime after the 1950s.

According to local tradition, Morgan Creek, and indeed the entire **Morgan Bottom**, were named for David Morgan. The Morgan family immigrated from Wales ca. 1850, moving first to Wisconsin and then arriving in the Denver area around 1862. All together, there were ten Morgan children, seven brothers and three sisters—and all but one spent their adult lives in the Yampa and Little Snake river country. The first of the clan to arrive were Dave and his older brother Joe, when they established a trading post near the mouth of Elkhead Creek in 1872. Joe was the proprietor, while Dave worked as the freighter, driving a wagon team to and from the railroad stop at Rawlins, Wyoming. Dave Morgan would spend most of his long life farther downstream (ranching in the Axial Basin and then prospecting for oil while based in the Craig area), but his 1936 obituary in the *Craig Empire Courier* also made a point of stating that he "spent the winter of 1873–1874 with his headquarters and cabin on Morgan Bottom"—providing a local residency just long enough to give the bottom its enduring name.

RM 175.9 The diversion berm on river left is for the **Walker Ditch**. The original water appropriation for the ditch was shared between William Walker and his brother-in-law, Samuel Reid, both of whom were among the earliest homesteaders in the Hayden area—Reid arriving in 1880 and Walker in 1881. By the time the district court adjudicated the water right in 1892, there were eight shareholders. It was Walker and neighbor Ephus Donelson who, in 1894, platted portions of their lands to create the original Hayden townsite.

RM 177.3 On river left, immediately downstream of the Union Pacific railroad bridge, look for where the **Williams Ditch** diverts water from the Yampa. Robert P. Williams homesteaded in Morgan Bottom in 1881. He was apparently well liked by the community, and was soon elected a Routt County commissioner. He was the sole user of the original ditch, irrigating just his own 320 acres. Robert Williams died in 1898, at only 52 years of age, while suffering the consequences of infection from a barbed wire cut to his leg.

In late 2022, substantial regrading was done to the river channel just downstream of the ditch entrance. The intent was to raise the water level at the headgate, and the result was a **new set of gravel bars and islands** stretching from left to right across the river. Use some caution in this area. The upstream ends of these new features tend to collect a lot of woody debris each spring, and the channels between them are still sorting themselves out. At lower water levels, look for the best passage in one of the channels on the right side of the river.

Hayden Pump Station

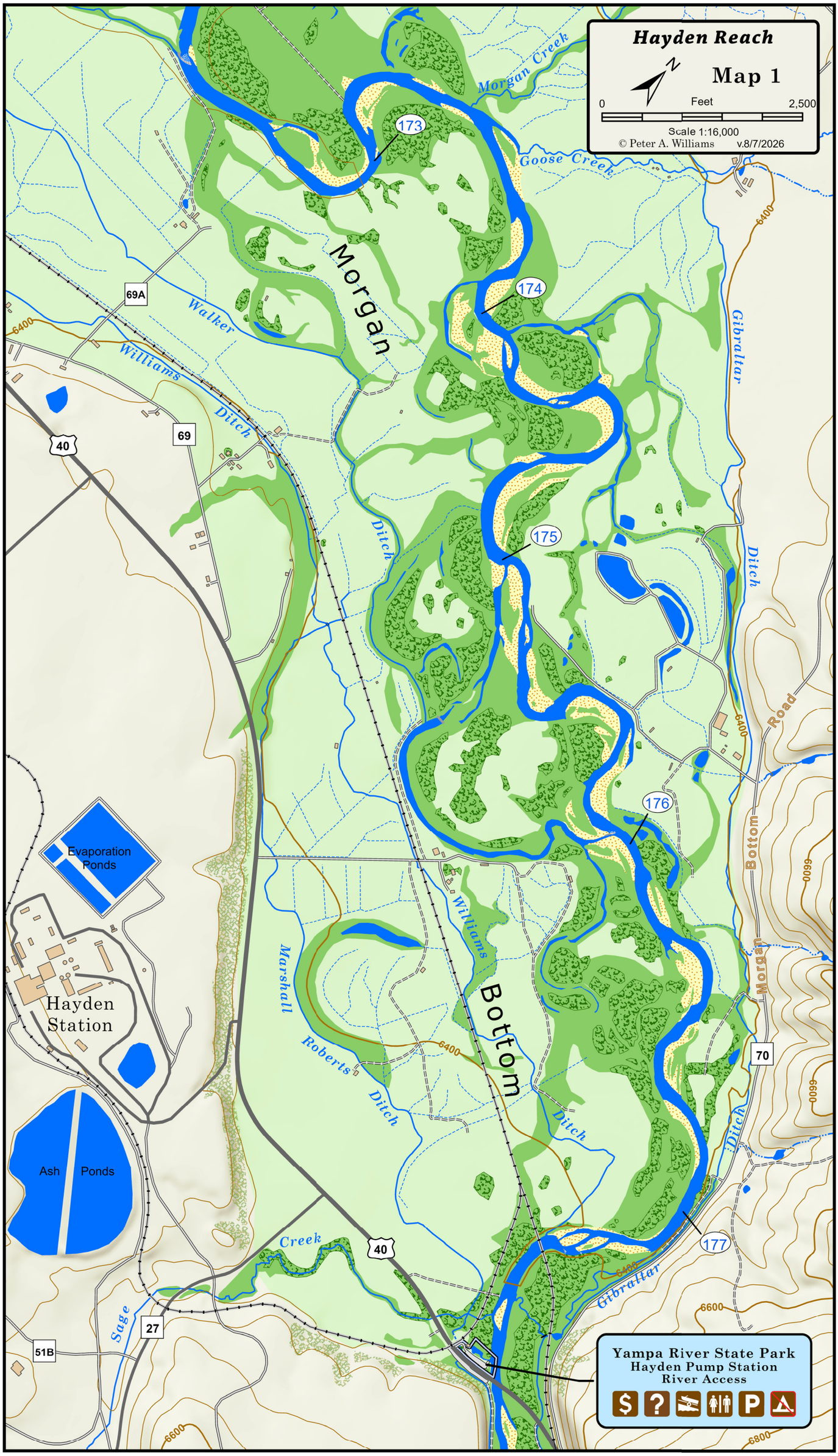
The Hayden Reach starts at the Hayden Pump Station boat ramp. While the pump station itself is owned and operated by Xcel Energy, the parking area and boat ramp facilities are owned by Colorado Parks and Wildlife. You will be starting your float at the most upstream boat ramp in the **Yampa River State Park** system, which directly manages (or coordinates with other city, county and federal managers) a total of 13 public river access points between here and Dinosaur National Monument, approximately 130 miles downstream.

The pump station supplies water to the **Hayden Station** power plant, located on the hilltop roughly a mile to the west. The Hayden Station is a coal-fired plant operated by Xcel Energy, producing roughly 447 megawatts of electrical power. Unit 1 came on line in 1965, and was joined by the larger Unit 2 in 1976. Xcel is currently planning to retire both coal-burning units by the end of 2028. As a part of negotiations over a "just transition" for Colorado coal communities impacted by coal power plant closures, the Colorado Public Utilities Commission may require Xcel to donate the pump station property to the City of Hayden sometime in the future, potentially allowing for the expansion of the river recreation facilities at this location.

Information courtesy:

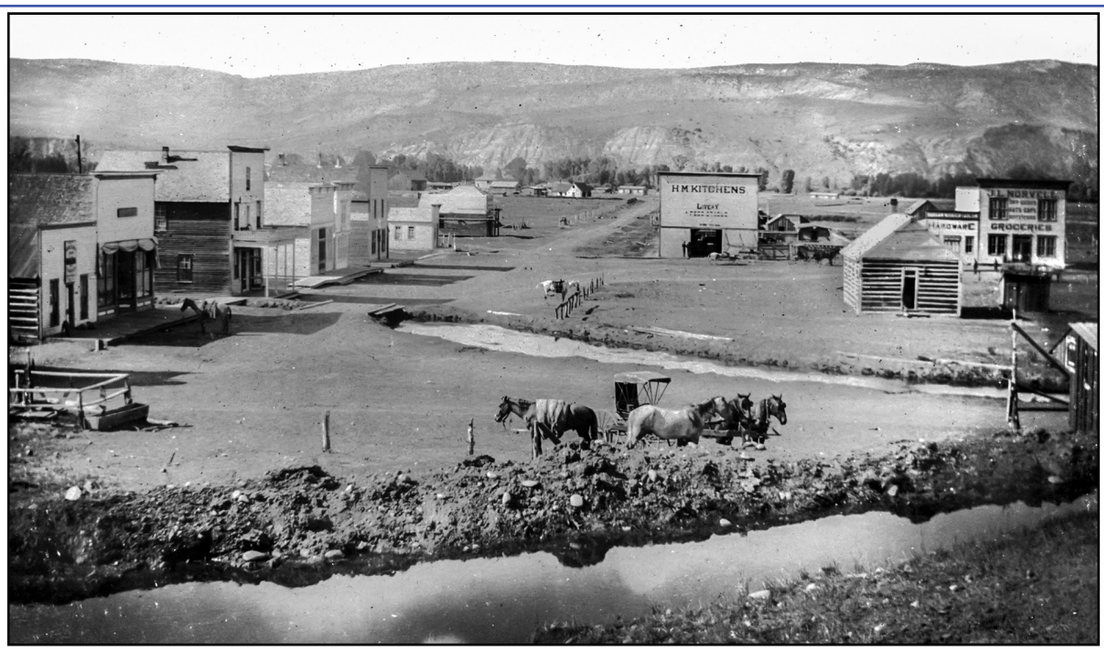
Colorado Department of Natural Resources, **Division of Water Resources**
Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library
The Colorado Sun, December 23, 2025
Hayden Heritage Center, *History of West Routt County, Colorado* (nd)
Leslie, Jan, and the Hayden Heritage Center, *Images of America, Hayden* (2010)
Stanko, et al., *The Historical Guide to Routt County* (2010)

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Hayden Reach
Map 1
0
Feet
2,500
Scale 1:16,000
© Peter A. Williams v.8/7/2026
Morgan Creek
Goose Creek
Morgan
Walker
Williams
Ditch
Gibraltar
Ditch
Ditch
Bottom
Road
Morgan
Bottom
Williams
Marshall
Roberts
Ditch
Ditch
Ditch
Creek
Gibraltar
Sage
Creek
173
174
175
176
177
69A
69
40
40
27
51B
70
6400
6600
6800
Evaporation
Ponds
Hayden
Station
Ash
Ponds
Yampa River State Park
Hayden Pump Station
River Access

Hayden Reach Map 2

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



Hayden, Colorado. Photographer unknown, ca. late 1890s.
Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, X-21076 (detail).

The view in the photo above is to the northwest, up today's Walnut Street. The three-story building on the left was the Central Hotel. Henry Kitchens' livery stable, just right of center, faced Jefferson Avenue (which eventually became Highway 40). The white-chinked log cabin on the right was the first community-built schoolhouse. But predating all of these structures were the Walker Ditch, in the foreground, and the Shelton Ditch just beyond it.

RM 172.4 This large diversion structure is for the **Shelton Ditch**, named for prominent Hayden homesteader Ezekiel Shelton. Traveling from Ohio, Shelton had come by rail to Rawlins, then by wagon road to the north side of the Yampa River, where he arrived in mid-May 1882. As there were no bridges, he crossed the snowmelt-swollen river in a log canoe.

Just a few months later, in January, a group of recent homesteaders banded together to build a bridge at the spot where Shelton had crossed. A civil engineer and surveyor by trade, Shelton was the logical choice to be the foreman for the project. The result was a three-pier, four-span bridge made of hand-cut cottonwood logs, built from the surface of the frozen river.

The bridge was completed in mid-March 1883; the appropriation date for the new ditch was just a month later. Initially the ditch had six shareholders, with Shelton holding one of the larger shares, but by 1892 the water was already divided between fourteen homesteads.

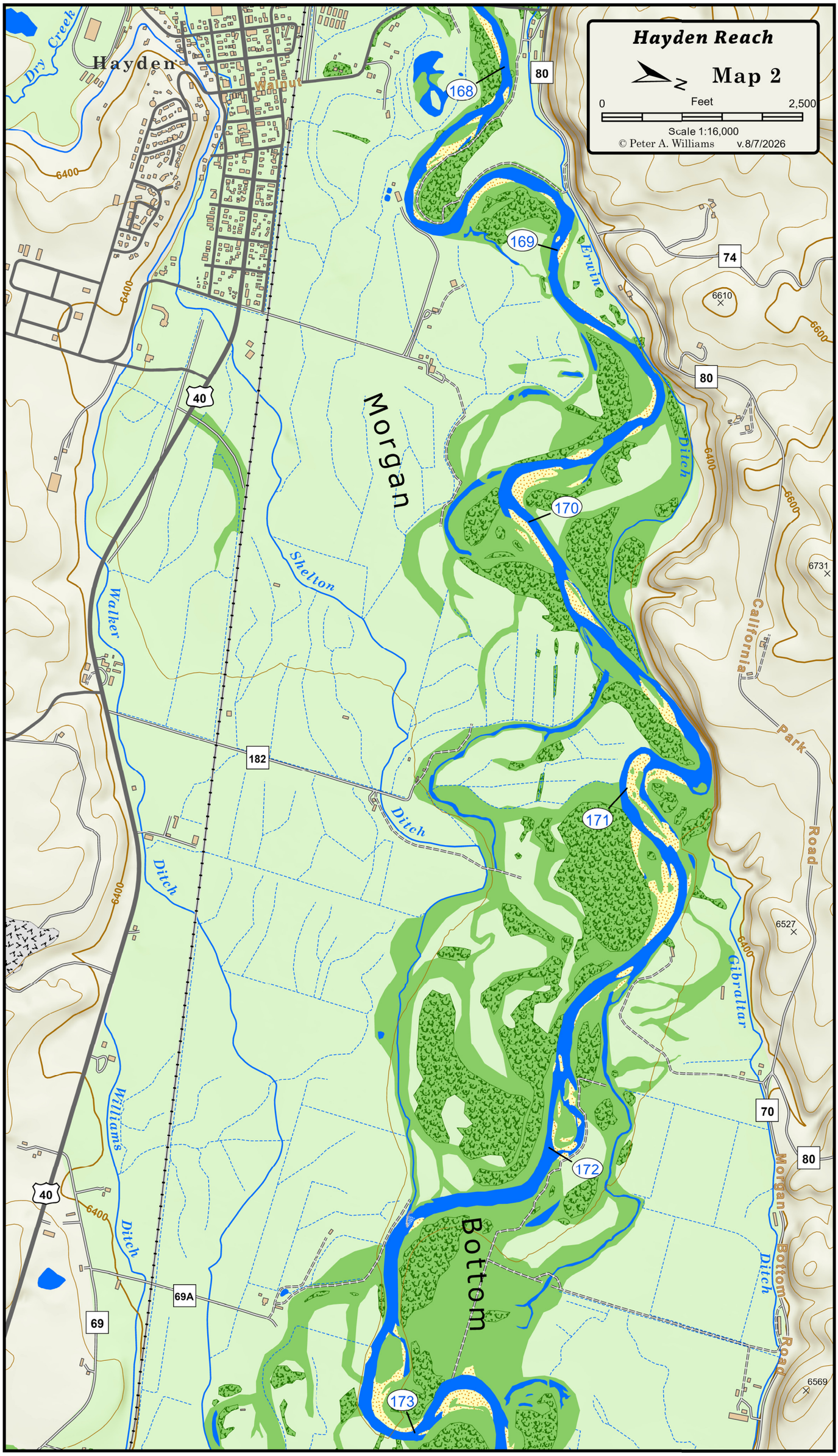
A Legacy of Ditches

In 1924, Ezekiel Shelton provided the *Hayden Republican* newspaper with a list of the 46 "pioneers" who had homesteaded the bottomlands from Mount Harris to Elkhead Creek, during the formative years of 1881–1886. (A pioneer himself, by 1924 Shelton had also served nearly a quarter century as the federal land commissioner, administering the local homesteading—so he was intimate with the history.) Not so coincidentally, nearly every major irrigation ditch existing in the valley today is named for someone included on Shelton's list. (The exceptions are the Cary Ditch—Sam Cary didn't file until 1889—and the Gibraltar Ditch).

After creating shelter, irrigation ditches were often the first order of business. Though they might bear a single name, the larger ditches were typically cooperative efforts, financed by groups of local shareholders, who in turn owned varying fractions of the water, according to the size of their investment. Although most of these ditches have appropriation dates in the early to mid-1880s (the nominal dates for when water use began, defining the priority of the original water right), it was also the norm for there to be later "enlargements," with a corresponding increase in the number of shareholders. Shelton observed that "at that time no one would think of taking a claim which could not be irrigated, as it was believed that paying crops could not be grown in Routt County without artificial irrigation." So ditches were dug, and "during those years nearly every acre of bottom land in [the Hayden] valley was filed upon."

Information courtesy:
Colorado Department of Natural Resources, **Division of Water Resources**
Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library
Hayden Heritage Center, *History of West Routt County, Colorado* (nd)
Leslie, Jan, and the Hayden Heritage Center, *Images of America, Hayden* (2010)

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Hayden Reach
Map 2
N
0
Feet
2,500
Scale 1:16,000
© Peter A. Williams
v.8/7/2026
Hayden
Walnut
Dry Creek
Morgan
Bottom
Erwin
Ditch
Shelton
Walker
Ditch
Ditch
Williams
Ditch
California
Park
Road
Gibraltar
Morgan
Bottom
Road
Ditch
168
169
170
171
172
173
80
74
80
40
182
40
69A
69
70
80
6400
6600
6610
6731
6527
6569

Hayden Reach Map 3

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

RM 164.5 The boat ramp at the **Yampa River State Park Headquarters** is on river right. You can end your trip here, or continue on another 7.7 miles to the Dorsey boat ramp at the Yampa River State Wildlife Area.

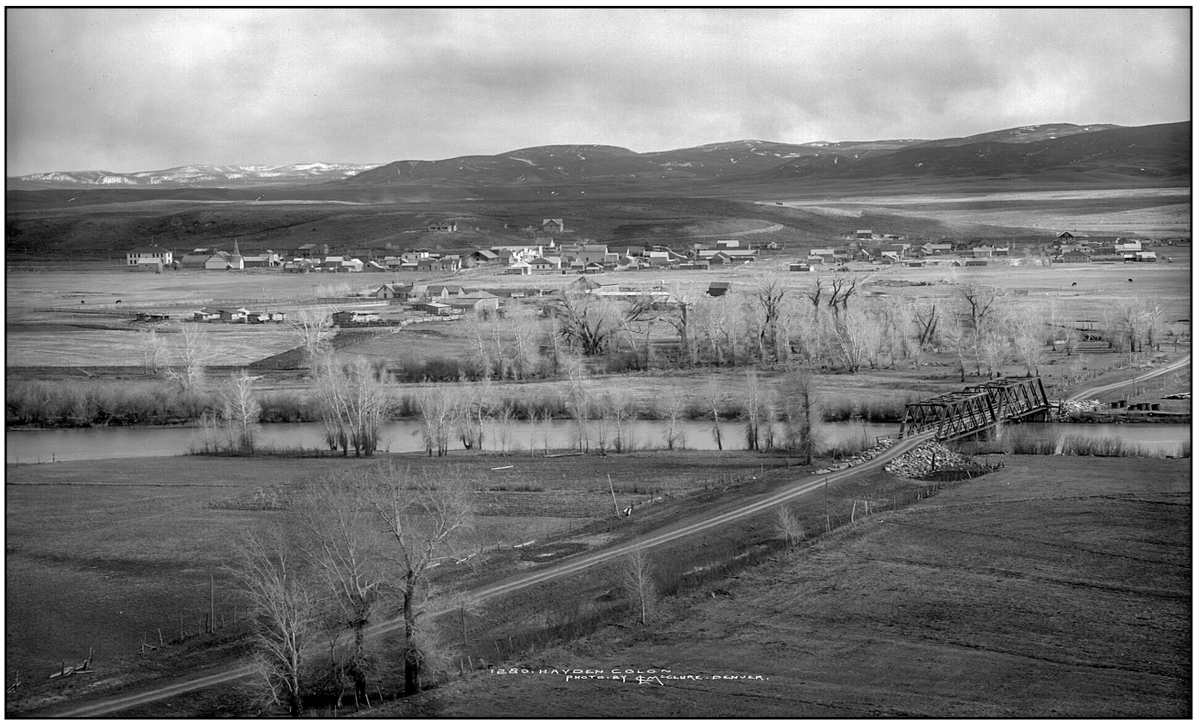
RM 164.9 At this point the original **Cary Ditch diversion** creates a rocky barrier across the river at lower flows. Getting out of your boat to drag it over the rocks would be trespassing on the adjacent private property, but a low-water "sneak" may be available on river right, as seen in the photograph. The concrete structure on the shore is the entrance to the previous ditch headgate, no longer in use.



The Cary diversion at about 770 cfs.

RM 165.6 The **US Highway 40** and **Union Pacific bridges** are not normally a problem for boaters, but may create a hazard at exceptionally high water. Under those conditions, scouting both bridges while running your shuttle would be a wise precaution.

As you float toward the bridges you may also notice the current **headgate for the Cary Ditch** on river right. The headgate was moved to this new location in 1998.



Hayden, Colorado. Photo by M. C. McClure, ca. 1910.
Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, MCC-1280.

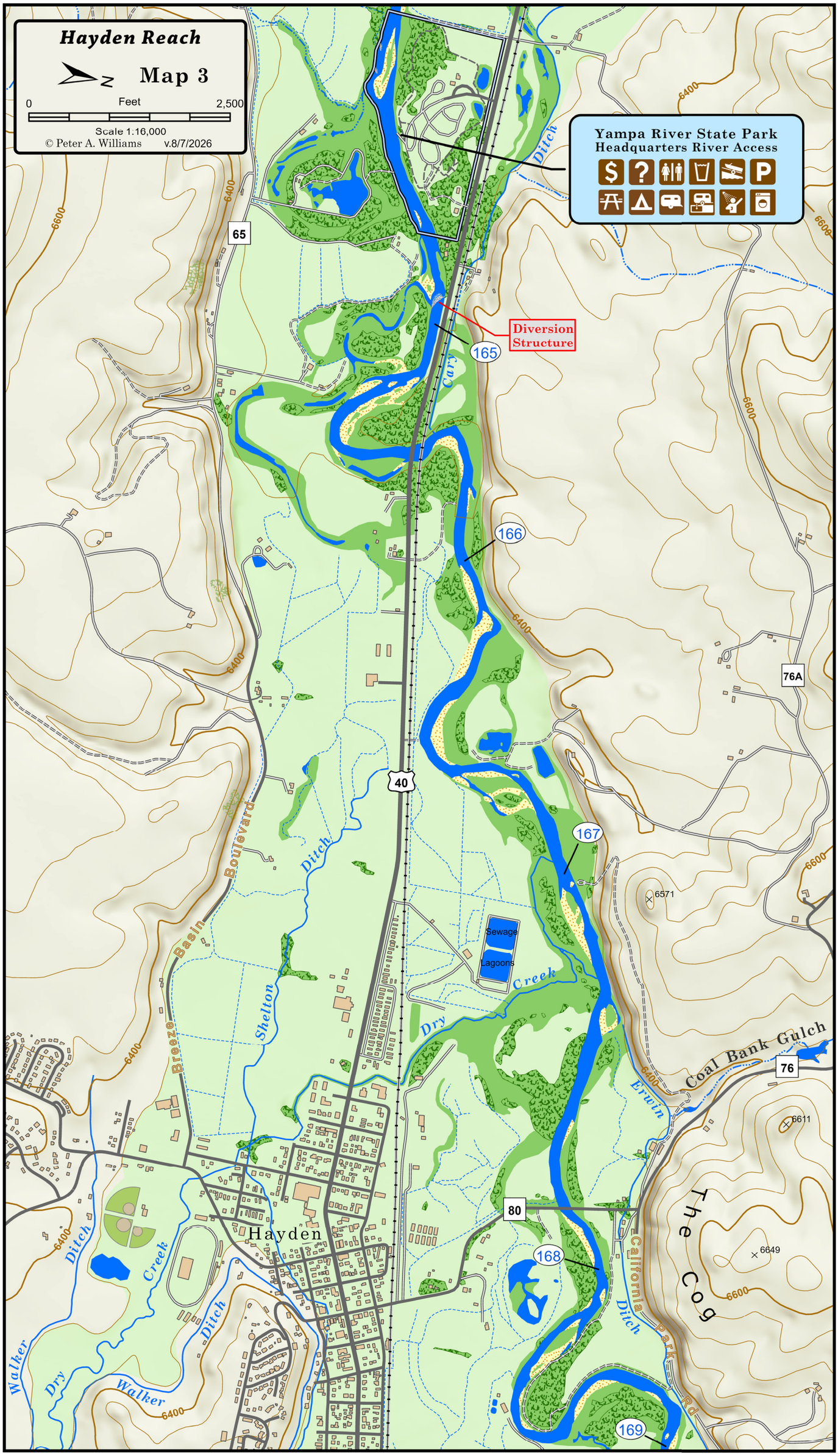
RM 167.8 The **Routt County 80 bridge** (Riverview Road bridge) should cause you no problems, except possibly during the most extreme high water conditions.

The original bridge at this location was the log bridge built over the frozen river in early 1883, using just axes and crosscut saws for tools (see RM 172.4 discussion). It was the second bridge to be built across the Yampa River anywhere (the first was the Government Bridge in the Axial Basin, south of Lay, on the Rawlins-to-Meeker road). The new bridge was vital for connecting Hayden to the outside world, because it eliminated the necessity of fording the river for travel to Steamboat, Craig, or the railroad terminal in Rawlins, Wyoming.

Ice flows destroyed the original log bridge in the spring of 1897, but within the year it was replaced with the iron-and-wood bridge seen in the photograph above. By 1916, age and decay dictated another replacement, this time with a steel bridge. That one lasted 60 years before collapsing under a semi-trailer loaded with wheat. The current bridge dates to 1977.

Information courtesy:
Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library
Hayden Heritage Center, *History of West Routt County, Colorado* (nd)

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Hayden Reach
Map 3
0
Feet
2,500
Scale 1:16,000
© Peter A. Williams v.8/7/2026
Yampa River State Park
Headquarters River Access
Diversion Structure
165
166
167
168
169
65
40
80
76
76A
Hayden
Cary Ditch
Breeze Basin Boulevard Ditch
Shelton Dry Creek
Dry Creek
Coal Bank Gulch
Erwin
California Park Rd
The Cog
Walker Dry Creek Ditch
Walker Ditch
Sewage Lagoons
6400
6600
6571
6611
6649

Hayden Reach Map 4

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



Cary Ranch Bldgs., Denver & Salt Lake R.R. Photo by M. C. McClure, ca. 1915.
Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, MCC-2158.

RM 162.5 As further described on the **Back Page** of this guide, over a hundred years ago nearly all of the Hayden Valley west of the town was part of the **Two Circle Bar Ranch** operation, also known as the **Cary Ranch**. The ranch headquarters buildings—with the three Cary brothers' family homes, employee housing, multiple barns, and extensive stockyards—were located just to the north of this point on the river. In 1913, the Denver and Salt Lake Railway laid its rails straight through the ranch, which was given its own station with a siding to service the stockyards. But when the Victory Highway was built parallel to the railroad right-of-way in the early 1920s, it had to make a short jog to the south to avoid those stockyards—and that jog can still be seen in the path of Highway 40 today.

RM 164.25 As soon as you leave the Yampa River State Park boat ramp, you will be floating through a stretch with shallows and a gravel bottom. This made for a convenient low-water ford across the river in years past. During the late 1800s it was known as Peck Ford, after the Peck family, on whose 1883 homestead it was located. In 1908, Routt County constructed a 200-foot, two-span wooden timber bridge where the west boundary of the YRSP now crosses the river. For a couple decades the **Peck Ford bridge** provided a slightly shorter alternative to the bridge north of Hayden for travelers heading west—until one of the Peck Ford spans was taken out by high water. What still remained of the bridge was then dismantled.

After you float away from the Yampa River State Park Headquarters west boundary, **private ranch property** will block your access to the shore for about 4.5 river miles, until you enter the upstream boundary of the Yampa River State Wildlife Area.

Yampa River State Park Headquarters

The Yampa River State Park (YRSP) manages (or coordinates with other city, county and federal managers) a total of 13 public river access points, distributed along about 130 miles of the Yampa River, from the Hayden Pump Station to Dinosaur National Monument.

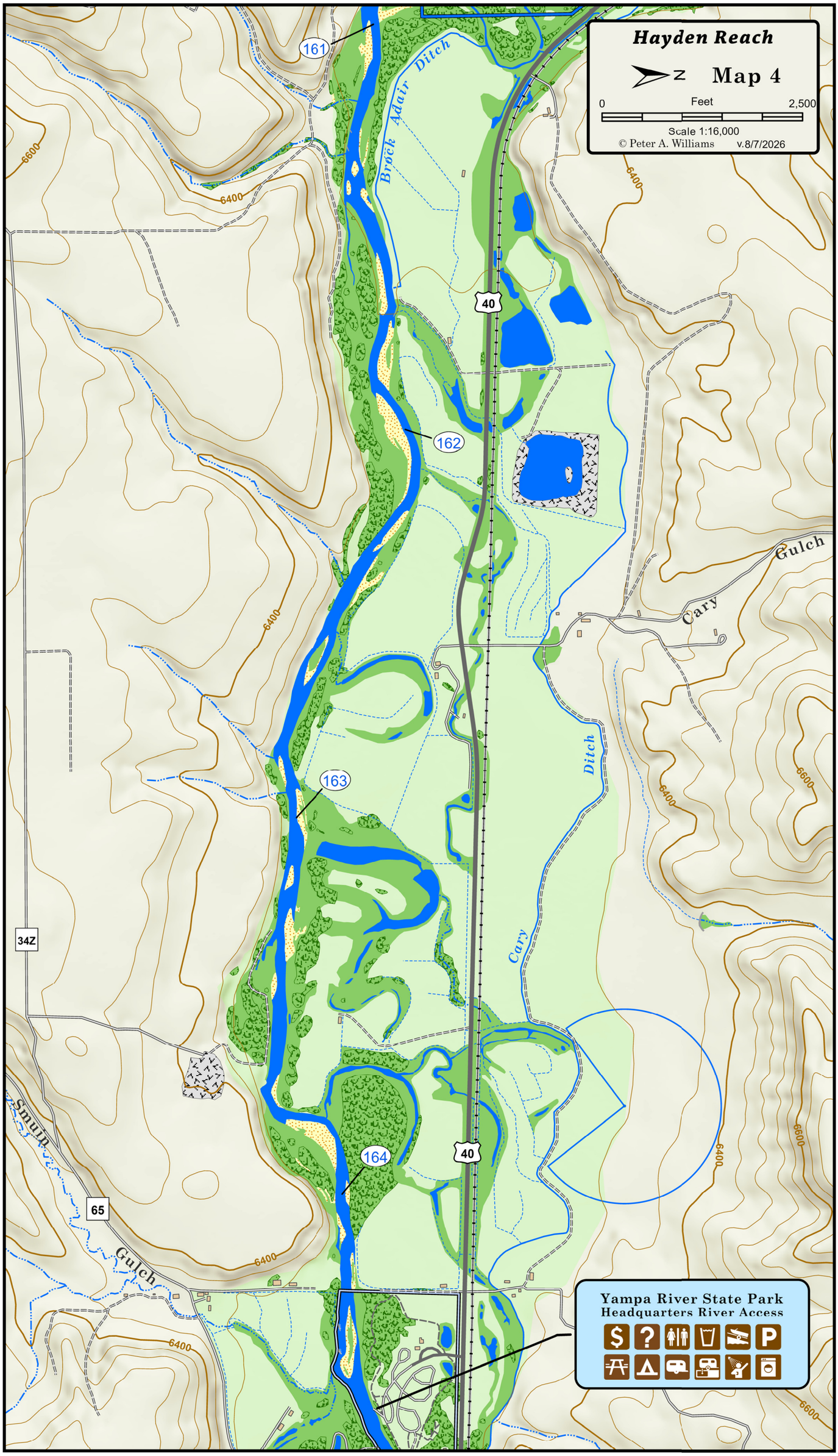
The YRSP Headquarters facilities include the administrative offices for the park, a boat ramp, and camping sites developed with recreational vehicle hookups. For boaters traveling the Yampa River, use of the YRSP Headquarters facilities is typically focused on day-trip access to the river—the campground does not provide a river camp conveniently close to the ramp.

Access to all of the boat ramps managed by the Yampa River State Park requires a daily or annual pass—you may have already purchased an annual pass with your Colorado automobile registration. Camping will require an additional fee. (Requirements at boat ramps managed by other entities, including the Yampa River State Wildlife Area, will differ.)

Information courtesy:

Bonnifield, Paul, "The Cary Ranch: Its Long Struggle to Survive," *Valley Voice* (#2.7, July 2013)
Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library
Hayden Heritage Center, *History of West Routt County, Colorado* (nd)

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Hayden Reach
Map 4
N
0
Feet
2,500
Scale 1:16,000
© Peter A. Williams
v.8/7/2026
Brock Adair Ditch
Cary Gulch
Cary Ditch
Smuin Gulch
161
162
163
164
40
34Z
65
6400
6600
Yampa River State Park
Headquarters River Access

Hayden Reach Map 5

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

RM 157.25 When you see the railroad bed running along the right bank of the river, you know you are approaching the **Dorsey boat ramp**, and the end of the Hayden Reach.

The photograph at right shows the **Lower Cary Ranch** in the years just before the railroad arrived in 1913. The open water visible at the river bend is where the railroad runs along the right river bank today. The Dorsey boat ramp is located where the river begins to disappear around the bend just downstream. Visible on the skyline at the left is Cedar Mountain, 4 miles northwest of Craig. The original ranch house (seen on the right) burned to the ground in 1943, but was rebuilt in 1947 after Kenneth Whiteman bought the ranch.



Lower Cary Ranch. Photo by M. C. McClure, ca. 1910.
Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, MCC-1285.

RM 160 The river **shortcutted this meander** during the high water of 2023. After a long, snowy winter, the Yampa had remained icebound into early April. However, by the end of that month spring melting was already pushing river flows up to 6,000 cfs, and some areas in the neck of the meander were beginning to flood. Flows continued to rise into May, peaking for the season at over 9,800 cfs on May 16. At those levels the river was flowing directly across the neck, and downcutting quickly established a new channel. By July, the declining flows revealed that the original upstream entrance to the meander was blocked by a large sand and gravel bar. The meander has continued to flood during high water events since then, but it is no longer the primary course of the river.

Yampa River State Wildlife Area



A mother osprey joins her juvenile offspring on a nesting platform in the YRSWA.

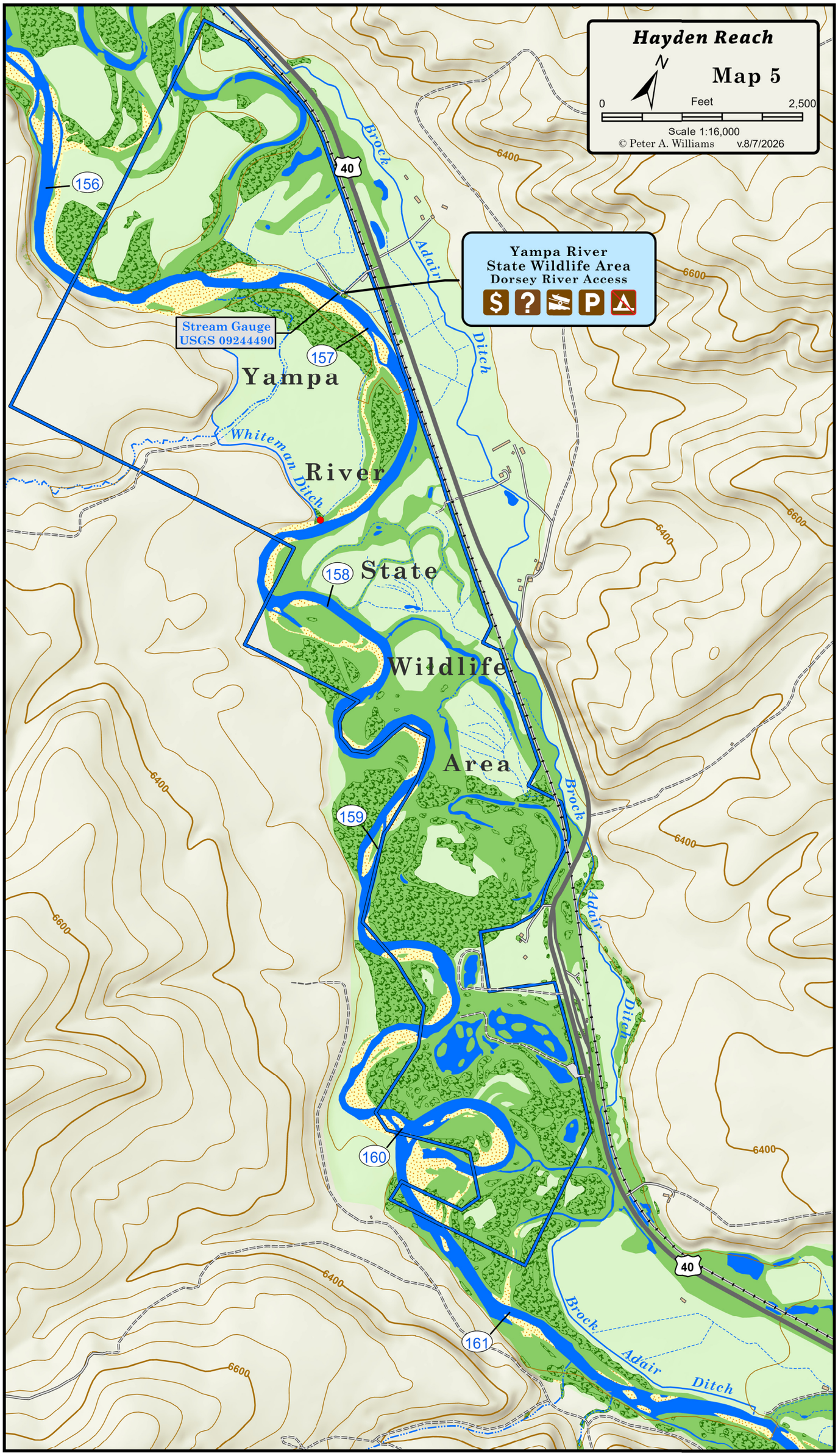
The Hayden Reach ends at the downstream end of the Yampa River State Wildlife Area (YRSWA). The **Dorsey boat ramp** is reached from Highway 40 at a turnoff approximately 2 miles east of the Moffat/Routt county line, or 5 miles west of the Yampa River State Park Headquarters (by river, the boat ramp is actually about 7.7 miles downstream of the headquarters). The turn is marked with a generic brown Yampa River State Wildlife Area sign, but there is also a small white railroad utility building at the track crossing, prominently labeled as "Dorsey," which lends the ramp its popular name. Please don't leave vehicles parked at the boat ramp—after unloading, park them in the lot close to the highway.

As with all state wildlife areas in Colorado, a valid hunting or fishing license, or a State Wildlife Area (SWA) pass is required for each individual, age 16 or older. Access to shore and use of the boat ramp is included in this requirement. Also note that a SWA pass is separate from the Colorado State Park pass you may have purchased with your vehicle registration. In Colorado, state wildlife areas and state parks are treated as different entities, with different passes.

Established in the 1980s, the YRSWA protects important riparian habitat along the Yampa River, and is a popular destination for waterfowl hunting, fishing, and bird watching. Camping, overnight parking, and fires are prohibited.

Information courtesy:
Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library
Copernicus Sentinel 2 satellite imagery
waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/09244490

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Hayden Reach
Map 5
0
Feet
2,500
Scale 1:16,000
© Peter A. Williams
v.8/7/2026
Yampa River
State Wildlife Area
Dorsey River Access
Stream Gauge
USGS 09244490
Yampa
River
State
Wildlife
Area
Whiteman Ditch
Brock Adair Ditch
156
157
158
159
160
161
40
6400
6600

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Hayden Reach Stream Gauge

RM 156.9 **USGS #09244490** Yampa River above Elkhead Creek

The **Yampa River above Elkhead Creek** gauge is located at the Dorsey boat ramp, at the very end of the Hayden Reach.

Additional information and further flow recommendations for the Hayden Reach can also be found at **https://friendsoftheyampa.com/know-before-you-go-hayden/**.

The Dawson/Carpenter Ranch

In 1901, after coal was discovered on his huge ranch in New Mexico, former Texas Ranger J. B. Dawson decided to sell out to a coal speculator at a significant profit. The next year he began buying up homesteads in Morgan Bottom and the surrounding country. For about a decade he lived a "baronial" lifestyle at the Morgan Bottom ranch, raising cattle and horses (and a captive herd of elk), before retiring to California. His sons worked the ranch for a few more years, until Dawson sold out again, this time in 1915 to the Victor-American Fuel Company.

Victor-American originally planned to use the Dawson Ranch for a coal mine and company town (they formally platted a "Dawson" townsite). But by 1917 they had changed direction, and instead set up their operations on their Wadge property, adjacent to Mount Harris. That's where, in the 1920s, they began tunneling westward, following the coal seams that eventually led them back under Gibraltar Rock and deep beneath the property in Morgan Bottom. (The 1942 "Mount Harris" disaster was an explosion near the western end of the Wadge tunnel, under the ranch.)

Meanwhile, Victor-American hired a ranch manager and continued actively ranching on the Dawson properties until 1925, when they leased the ranch to Farrington Carpenter (a local attorney, and previously an occasional Dawson ranch hand). For the next two decades Carpenter developed a large and well respected cattle operation on the leased ranch. Then, in the mid-1940s, Carpenter negotiated a series of financial arrangements that gained him ownership of the core Morgan Bottom portions of the ranch, from which he continued a pared down, but highly successful business raising prize-winning purebred Hereford bulls.

After Carpenter's death in 1980, his children continued working the ranch until 1995, when it was purchased by The Nature Conservancy. Today the **Carpenter Ranch Preserve** is under perpetual conservation easement, and is managed with the goal of exploring "ways to simultaneously pursue agricultural production and the conservation of streamside and wetland habitats." Public access to the property is available, but requires prior arrangement.

The Cary Ranch

Samuel Cary began homesteading on 160 acres west of the town of Hayden around 1885, before purchasing the property outright in 1889. His brother Robert, who had been running a very successful hardware store business in Leadville, may have provided some financial backing to Sam. Around 1895, Robert sold the Leadville store and, joined by third brother John, invested in a Denver mining supply business, which also became very successful. With their increased resources the two brothers then created the Yampa Livestock and Land Company, each holding a 45% share, and they brought Sam in with a 10% share—the contribution of his homestead.

The land company invested primarily in ranch properties, starting with the Adair ranch, located to the west of Sam's original homestead, and known thereafter as the "Lower" Cary Ranch. But the brothers were just getting started. In its heyday, the Cary Ranch operation (also known by its brand, the Two Bar Circle) owned over 25,000 acres in one continuous tract along the bottom lands from Hayden nearly to Craig. Additional properties were as widespread as the Williams Fork and Lily Park. Starting in 1901, the Carys built their palatial headquarters buildings at the mouth of Cary Gulch—designed as much to impress potential investors as to do the business of raising cattle and thoroughbred horses. In 1908 Robert and John gambled on longtime friend David Moffat's promise to establish Hayden as the rail hub for a coal, oil, timber, and cattle empire. They mortaged parts of the ranch to purchase more property along the west edge of the Hayden town limits, and promoted a new "West Hayden Townsite." But when Moffat died in 1912, and his railroad went bankrupt, the bubble began to burst. Though the railroad did finally reach Hayden in 1913, the town never become more than just a local stop. With Moffat's banking connections gone, the Cary debts began to be called in, and the company finally went into receivership in the 1920s. In 1939 the largest barn at the headquarters was torn down for its lumber. Half of the showpiece horse barn was relocated to a nearby property—it still survives today—but the rest of the headquarters structures eventually succumbed to fire or neglect.

Information courtesy:
Bonnifield, Paul, "The Cary Ranch," Parts I and II, *Valley Voice* (#2.6/2.7, June/July 2013)
Burroughs, John Rolfe, *Where the Old West Stayed Young* (1962)
Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library
Hayden Heritage Center, *History of West Routt County, Colorado* (nd)