

# Winter Recreation In the Rio Grande Basin

The snowpack of the San Juan Mountains, and their neighbors to the east, the Sangre de Cristo mountain range, are the source of water supplying the Rio Grande and other rivers and streams in the basin. But before this snow melts and flows downhill, it is enjoyed for recreation during the winter months all throughout the Rio Grande River Basin. \$366.2 million is spent in total annually in the Basin, and there are 35,868 participants in winter sports (*Business for Water Stewardship- \*see QR code for full study*).

## Skiing and Snowboarding

Skiing and snowboarding are a popular winter recreation activity, with Wolf Creek Ski area near Pagosa Springs being the biggest ski resort in the basin. Wolf Creek Ski Area is famously known for having “The Most Snow in Colorado”, with 1,600 skiable acres and 10 lifts servicing 133 runs in total, along with some of Colorado’s best hike-to runs. Wolf Creek receives an average of 430 inches of snowfall annually. (onthesnow.com)

Skiers and snowboarders can also venture into the vast backcountry of the Rio Grande National Forest for their powder fix. Make sure you have proper safety equipment, training, and are aware of avalanche conditions for the day, as Colorado has the most dangerous snowpack in the country (CAIC). According to the Forest Service site, the national forest boasts 29 official trails on which cross country skiers and snowshoers can explore these mountains.

## Snowmobiling

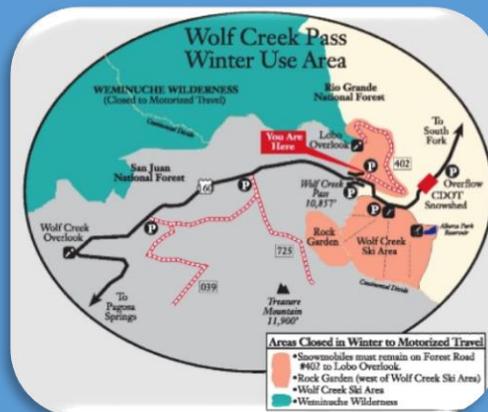
For those who prefer engines to their legs as a way to explore the winter wonderlands of the Rio Grande Basin, snowmobiling is another popular winter recreation activity. The Rio Grande National Forest has 18 snowmobiling areas (fs.usda.gov) where snowmobilers can unload and venture into these areas, though it is important to be aware of the wilderness zones and other areas where motorized vehicles are prohibited.

### Helpful links:

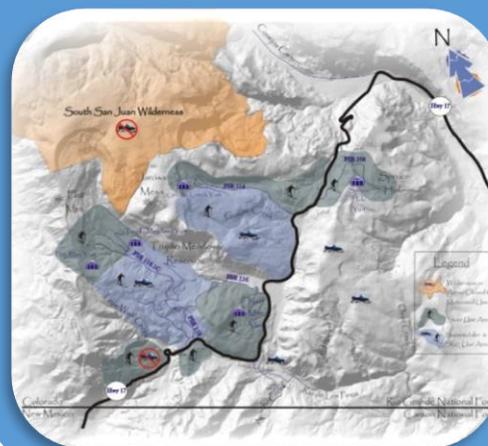
- <https://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/riogrande/recreation/wintersports>
- <https://www.onthesnow.com/colorado/wolf-creek-ski-area/ski-resort>
- <https://avalanche.state.co.us/>
- <https://visitmontevista.com/ice-fishing-in-the-san-luis-valley/>

There are two main mountain passes where National Forest access is located for winter recreation- Wolf Creek Pass and Cumbres Pass.

### Wolf Creek



### Cumbres



## Angling

While it’s a popular Colorado summer pastime, winter angling is also enjoyed throughout the Rio Grande Basin. Ice fishing, or “hard water fishing” is quite popular, with some of the most accessible locations including Mountain Home Reservoir and Beaver Creek Reservoir. Other locations such as Trujillo Reservoir and Big Meadows that require snowmobile or cross country ski access are also great options!

\*QR code for  
Business for Water  
Stewardship  
Economics of  
Recreation Study

