





# Finding Awesome Dispersed Campsites

*Confidently and legally camp in amazing places*











# About Me

## Who is Adam Zolyak?

- Overlanding 10 years with my partner Val and often friends
- Camped at 100s of dispersed campsites
- Camping, hiking, padding, and exploring 25+ years
- Long time maker - software, 3D printing, teaching, photography, videography, ...
- Home base near Denver, CO but often somewhere in the west



# Agenda

## What are we learning today?

- What is dispersed camping?
- General Guidelines / Rules
- The 5 Steps to Finding An Awesome Campsite
- Q&A



# Dispersed Camping Resource Guide

These slides + my recommended resources



<https://journey-labs.ck.page/expodispersed>



# Why dispersed camping?

- Beautiful places
- Less annoying sounds
- Less crowded
- Free or low cost
- Exploration and discovery along the way



**What is dispersed  
camping?**



# What is dispersed camping?

## Definition

**Dispersed vehicle camping is a form of camping where travelers set up their campsites outside of designated campgrounds generally on public land.**

Also known as “boondocking”, “wild camping”, or “free camping”. There are generally no amenities and you must be entirely self sufficient.





**Can you dispersed camp here?**



~~Planning~~

**Preparation = Ready Options**

# Dispersed Camping General Guidelines



# Where can you dispersed camp?

## General Guidelines

In general, you can dispersed camp on USFS or BLM public land unless otherwise posted and while following dispersed camping regulations.



# Dispersed Camping Regulations

## General Guidelines

- Prefer **established roads, campsites, and fire rings**
- Vehicle travel within **300 feet of designated roads**
- Bring everything you need (food, water, waste management)
- Follow Leave No Trace principles while driving and camping
- Follow **area specific regulations** as posted in the area and online



# Dispersed Camping Regulations

## General Guidelines

- Don't dispersed camp
  - On **private land** unless you have approval
  - Within **1/4 mile of recreations sites** (campgrounds, trailheads, etc)
  - Within **~100-200 feet of fresh water** (rivers, lakes)
  - For **more than ~2 weeks** in the same site; move a few miles
  - **Too close to other campers**
- Follow fire restrictions, seasonal road closures, and area specific regulations as posted in the area and online

# 5 Steps for Finding Sites

**Finding awesome dispersed campsites**

1. WIFM?
2. Where can I drive?
3. Where can I dispersed camp?
4. Scouting Sites
5. Picking A Site (the hardest part)



# WIFM?

## Step 1



**A Story...**



# What's In It For Me (& My Group)

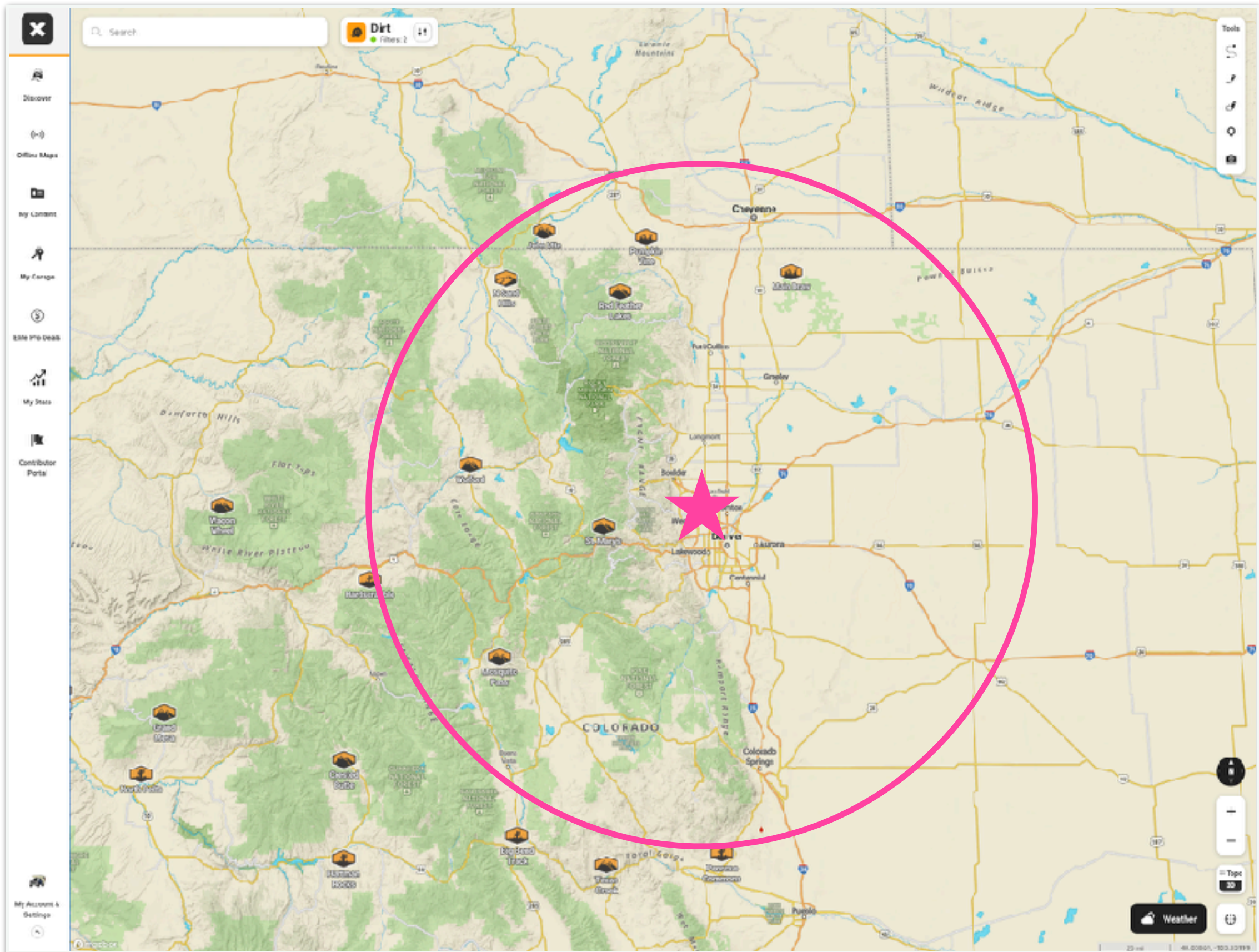
## Step 1

- What's the goal of your trip?
  - **Why:** Hanging out at camp with friends and hiking
    - One of which has never dispersed camped before
    - POIs: hiking, padding, rocks,...
  - **When:** Spring
  - **Duration:** A 3 day weekend
  - **Distance:** Within ~2 hours of home

# Can I drive off-road there?

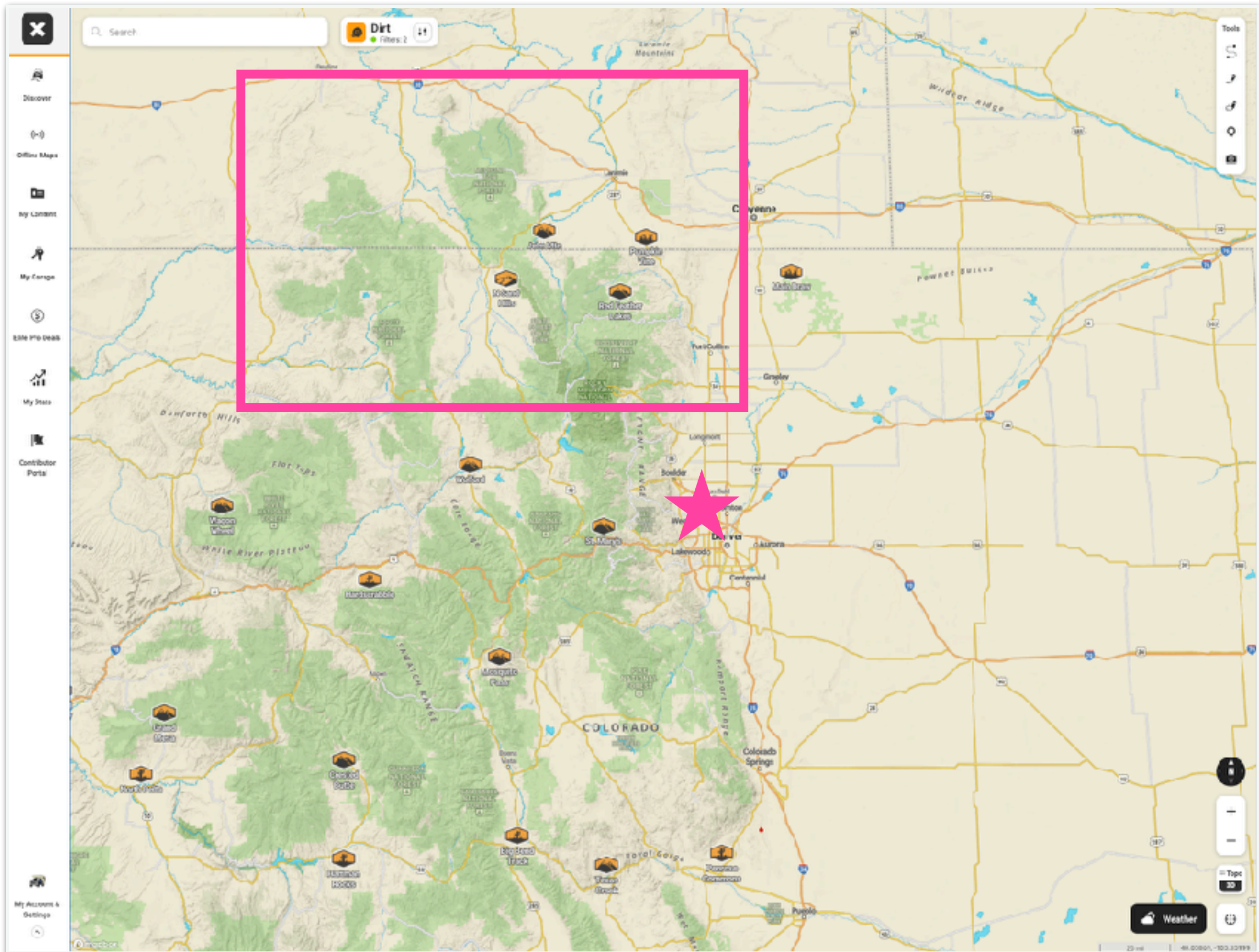
## Step 2

# What's within 2 hours of home?



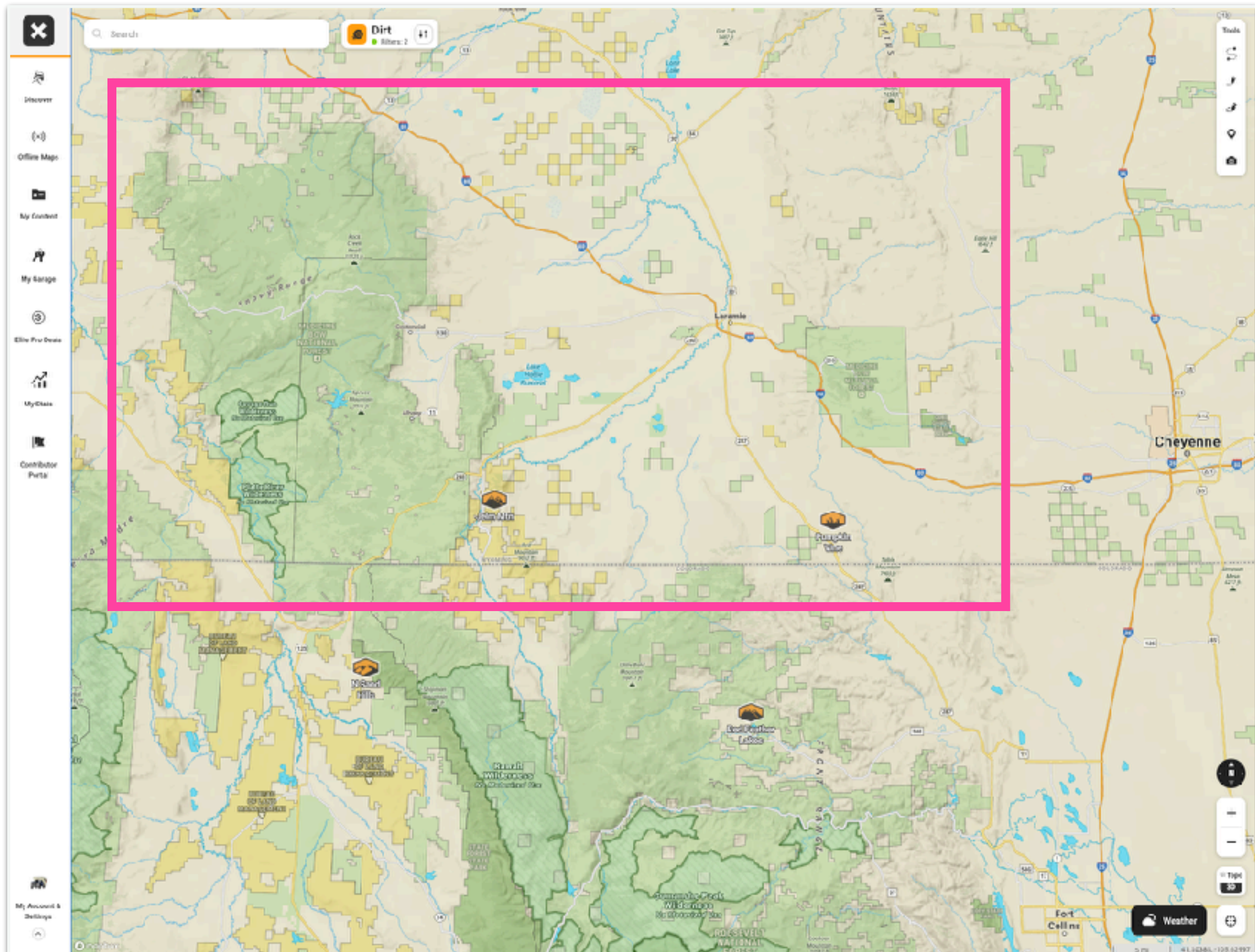


# There's less traffic going north...



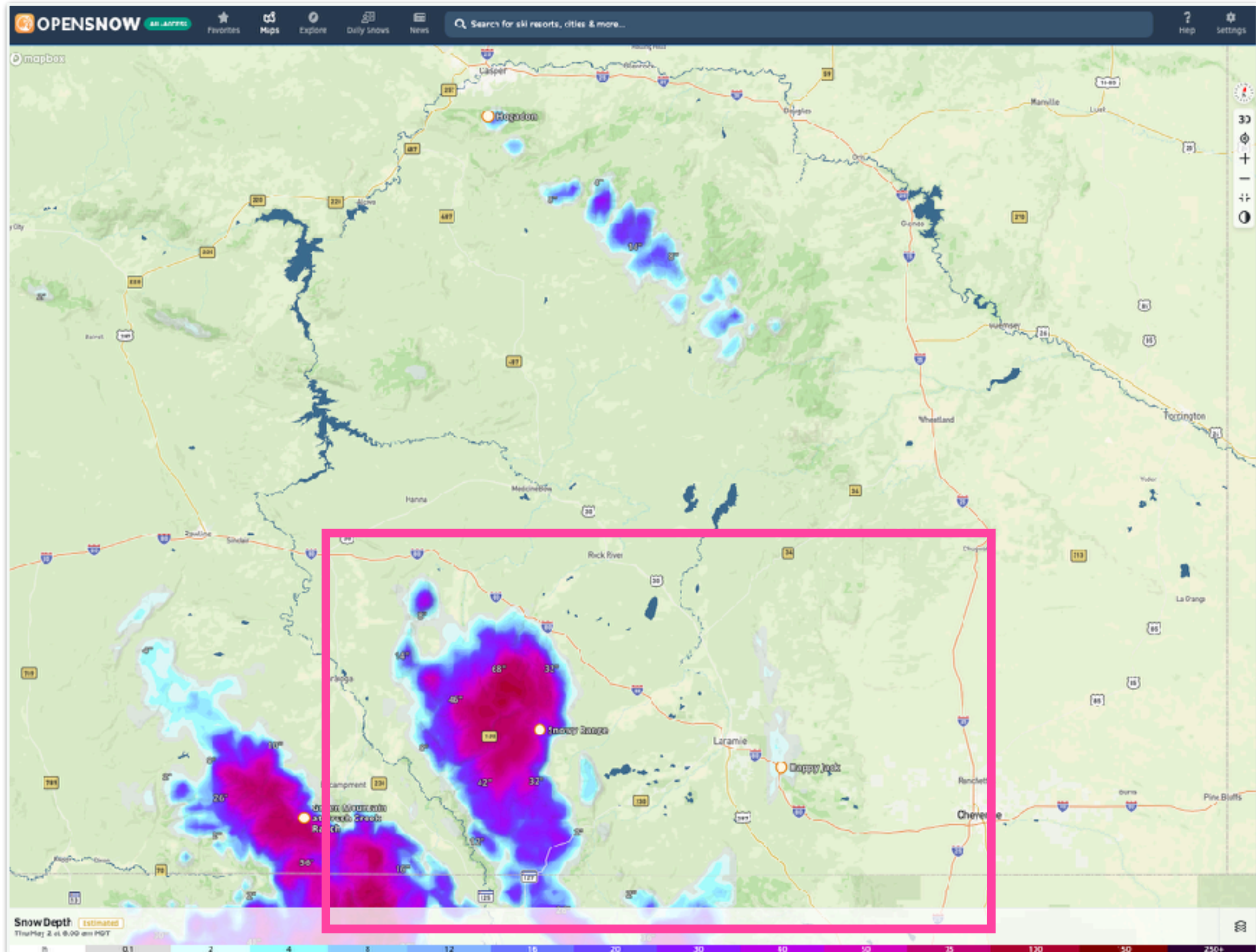


# How about Wyoming?





# What's the snowpack in May?





# Maybe Pole Mountain?

**Discover**

**Nearby Trails**

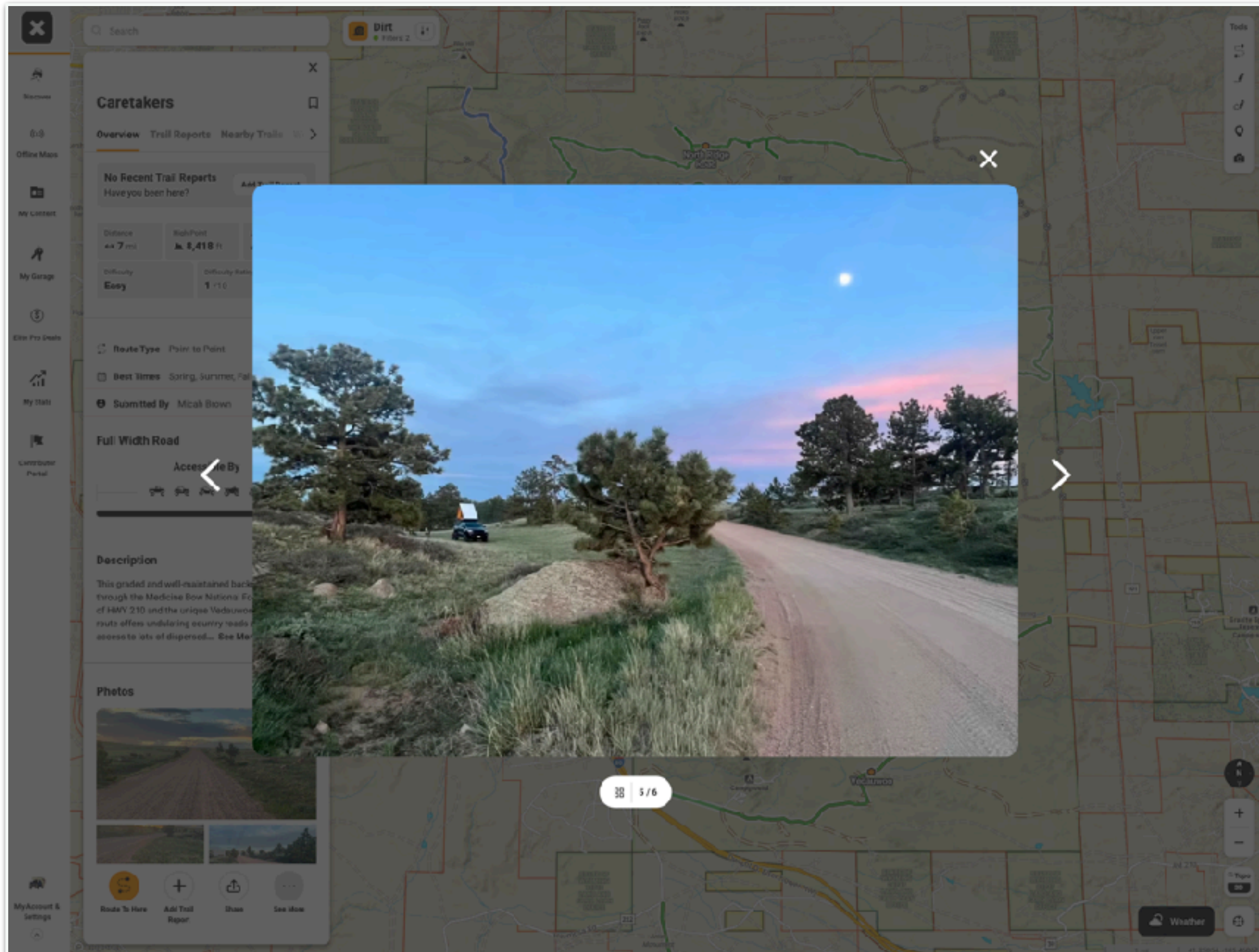
- Twiss Mountain Trail**  
32.0 mi | Duration: 1 hrs  
Technical Rating: 4/10
- Tame Cat**  
2 mi | Duration: 0.71 hrs  
Technical Rating: 3/10
- Caretakers**  
6.53 mi  
Technical Rating: 1/10
- Crow Spring Road**  
8.35 mi | Duration: 1 hrs  
Technical Rating: 3/10
- Eagle Rock**  
6.37 mi | Duration: 1 hrs  
Technical Rating: 2/10
- Telephone Extension**  
22 mi | Duration: 0.5 hrs  
Technical Rating: 3/10
- Vedauwoo**  
7.35 mi  
Technical Rating: 2/10
- North Ridge Road**  
8.65 mi | Duration: 1 hrs  
Technical Rating: 3/10
- Sullivan Spring Road**  
14.9 mi | Duration: 0.5 hrs  
Technical Rating: 4/10
- West Plot Hill Road And Laycock Spring**  
2.46 mi | Duration: 1.25 hrs  
Technical Rating: 4/10
- Headquarters Spur D**  
Accessible By:  
High Clearance 4x4 3x3 ATV 12ft max

**Map Interface:**

- Search:** Search this Area
- Map Features:** DIT, Elevation, Search this Area, Search, Zoom in (+), Zoom out (-), Map type (Topo), Weather, Scale bar (1 mi).
- Trail Highlights:** Twiss Mountain Trail, Tame Cat, Caretakers, Crow Spring Road, Eagle Rock, Telephone Extension, Vedauwoo, North Ridge Road, Sullivan Spring Road, West Plot Hill Road And Laycock Spring, Headquarters Spur D.
- Geographic Labels:** Pole Mountain, Eagle Rock, Telephone Extension, Crow Spring Road, Vedauwoo, Headquarters Spur D, Sullivan Spring Road, West Plot Hill Road And Laycock Spring, North Ridge Road, Caretakers, Tame Cat, Twiss Mountain Trail.



# What's the scenery like? What are the roads like?

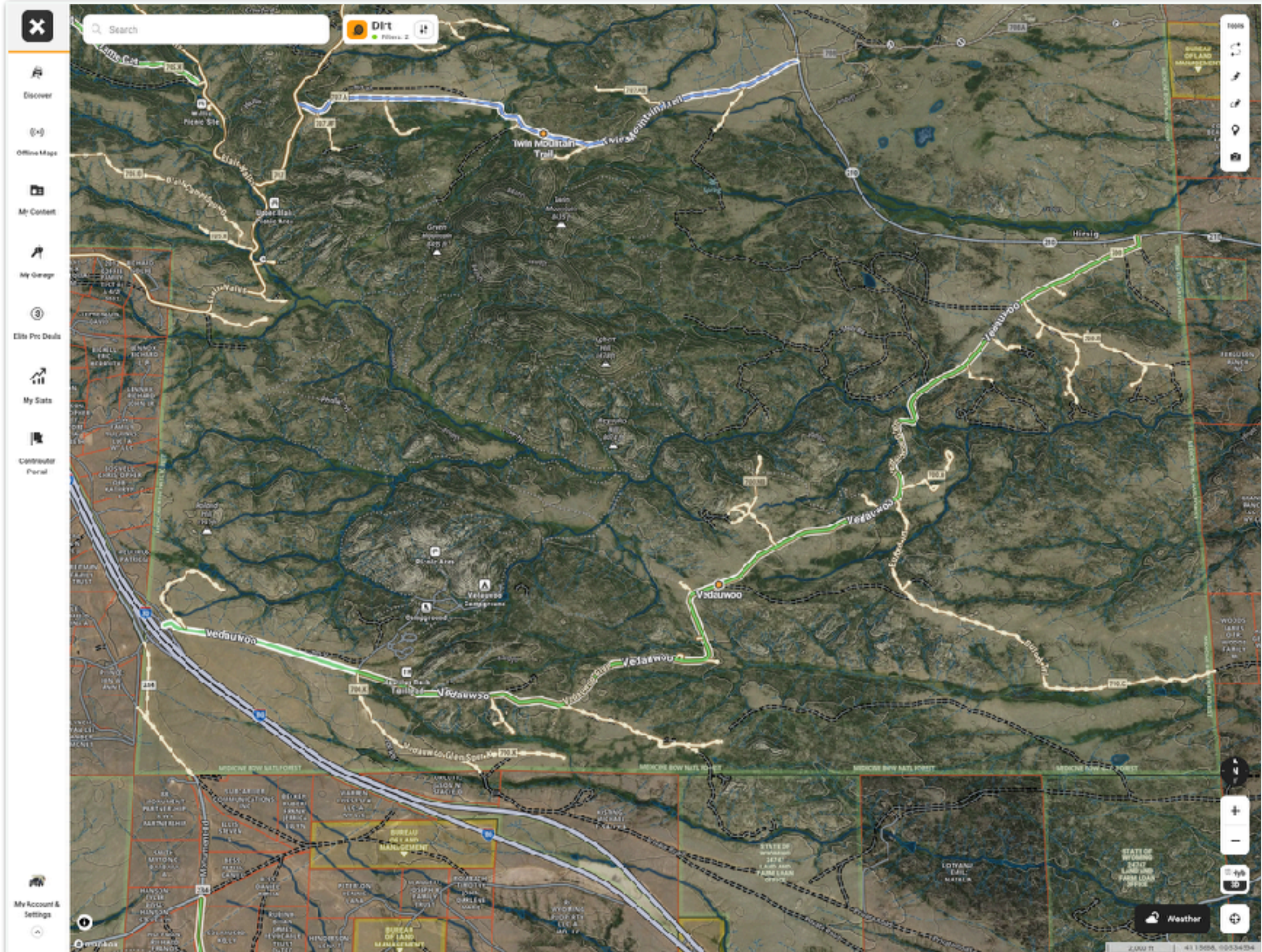






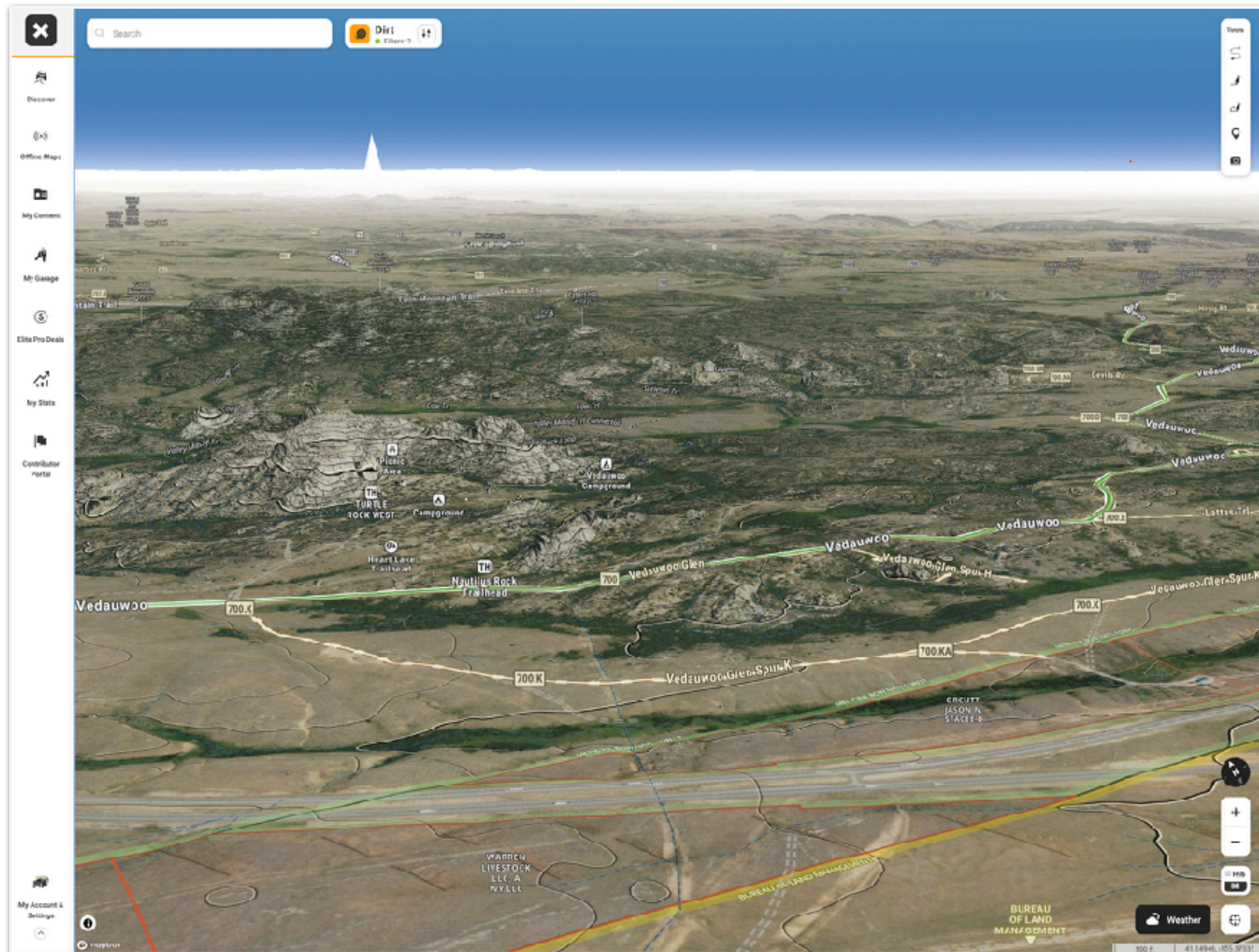


# What's the typography like?





# This area looks cool! Cool rocks and hiking.





# Can I dispersed camp there?

## Step 3

# Finding and Saving Options

## Step 3

- Maps
  - Public and private **land ownership**
  - Topo and **satellite imagery**
  - **3D terrain** perspective views
  - **Guided trails:** photos, descriptions, difficulty ratings
  - **Marking POIs and sites** and routes
- Search websites, YouTube, etc for additional info, other maps, etc
- **Call the local field office** and talk with a ranger



# Can I dispersed camp here?

The image shows a mobile application interface for a map. The main map displays a topographic view of a mountainous region, with a green line indicating a trail or road. A sidebar on the left provides information about the Medicine Bow National Forest and the Laramie Ranger District. Two pink arrows point from the sidebar text to the map: one points to the 'LARAMIE RANGER DISTRICT' text, and the other points to the 'Visit Website' link.

**MEDICINE BOW NATL FOREST**

Overview Nearby Trails Weather

**Government Lands**

Name  
MEDICINE BOW NATL FOREST

Acres  
55,338.5

Coordinates 41.15740, -105.35214 [Copy](#)

**US Forest Service Ranger District**

Ranger District Name  
LARAMIE RANGER DISTRICT

Forest Service Alerts & Notices URL  
[Visit Website](#)


Ranger District Phone Number  
307-745-2300

Forest Service Contact info URL  
[Visit Website](#)

Map features include a search bar, a 'Dirt' filter, a 'Tools' menu, and a 'Weather' button at the bottom right. The map shows various landmarks, including 'Twin Mountain Trail' and 'Vedauwoo'.




# Can I dispersed camp here? MVUM Maps

**Forest Service**  
Caring For the Land and Serving People

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests & Thunder Basin National Grassland  
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[Home](#) | [Visit Us](#) | [Managing the Land](#) | [Learn](#) | [Working With Us](#) | [About Us](#)

Keyword Search 

## Motor Vehicle Use Map

The Motor Vehicle Map (MVUM) displays National Forest System (NFS) roads, trails, and areas that are designated open to motor vehicle travel. It is the public's responsibility to reference the MVUM to determine which routes are designated for motor vehicle use.

The MVUM is free and available online and at [ranger district offices](#).

### Maps

#### Maps for Mobile Devices

Download Free Official MVUMs to your Mobile Device with the [Avenza Maps Mobile App](#).

- [Medicine Bow NF MVUM](#) - Laramie Peak - Douglas Ranger District
- [Medicine Bow NF MVUM](#) - Pole Mountain - Laramie Ranger District
- [Medicine Bow NF MVUM](#) - Snowy Range - Laramie & Brush Creek/Hayden Ranger Districts
- [Medicine Bow NF MVUM](#) - Sierra Madre - Laramie & Brush Creek/Hayden Ranger Districts
- [Routt NF MVUM](#) - Parks Ranger District
- [Routt NF MVUM](#) - Hahns Peak - Bears Ears Ranger District
- [Routt NF MVUM](#) - Yampa Ranger District
- [Thunder Basin National Grassland MVUM \(North Half\)](#) - Douglas Ranger District
- [Thunder Basin National Grassland MVUM \(South Half\)](#) - Douglas Ranger District

#### Printable PDF Maps

*\*These are very large files and will not fit on a standard page.*

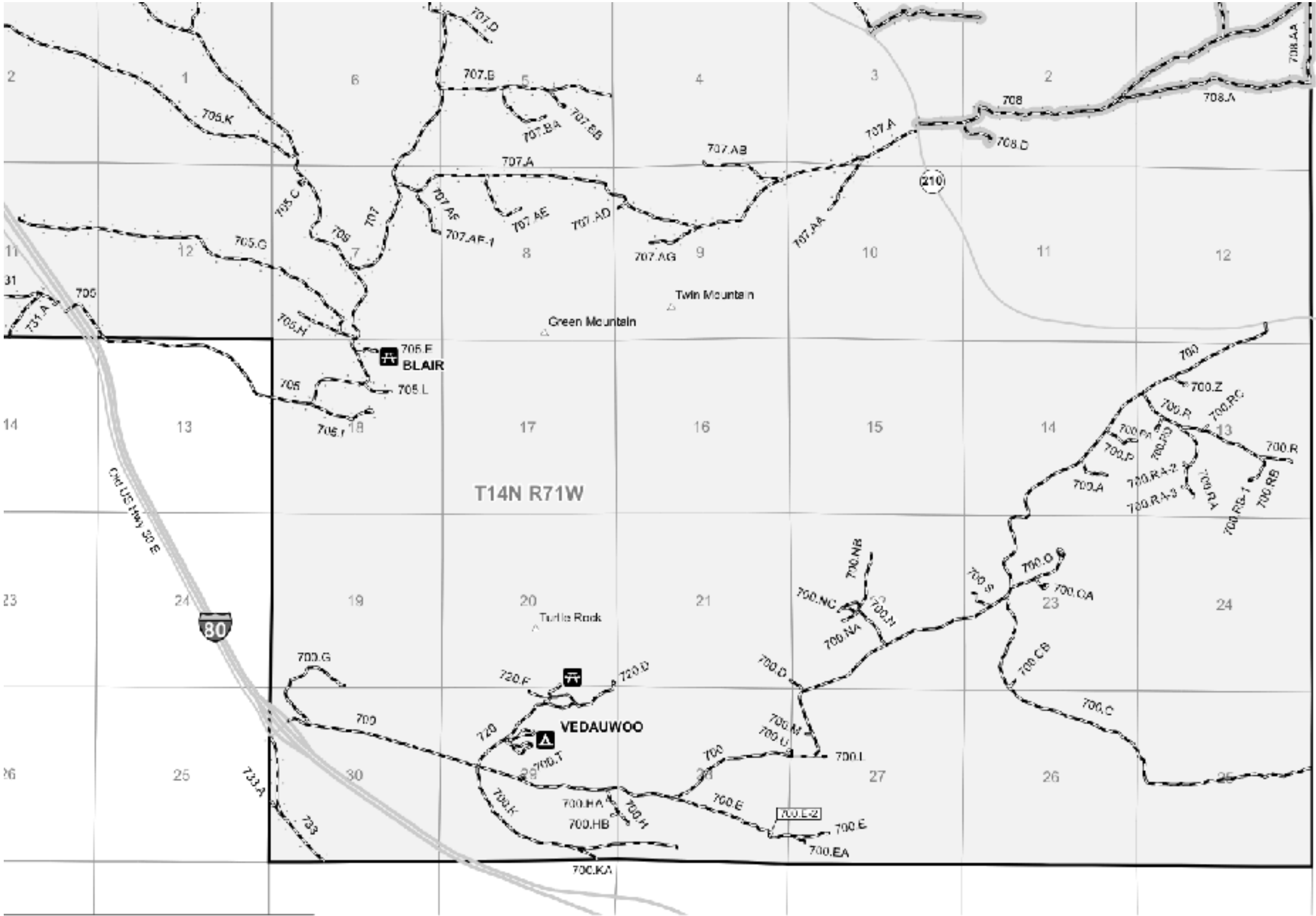
- Brush Creek/Hayden Ranger District: [Snowy Range](#) (.pdf)  
(Front side of map with regulations.)
- Brush Creek/Hayden Ranger District: [Sierra Madre](#) (.pdf)  
(Back side of map without regulations.)
- Douglas Ranger District: [Laramie Peak](#) (.pdf)
- Douglas Ranger District: [Spring Creek](#) (.pdf)  
(Front side with regulations listed)
- Douglas Ranger District: [Thunder Basin National Grassland](#) (.pdf)  
(Back side without regulations listed)



# Can I dispersed camp here? MVUM Maps

[illegible]

# Can I dispersed camp here? MVUM Maps



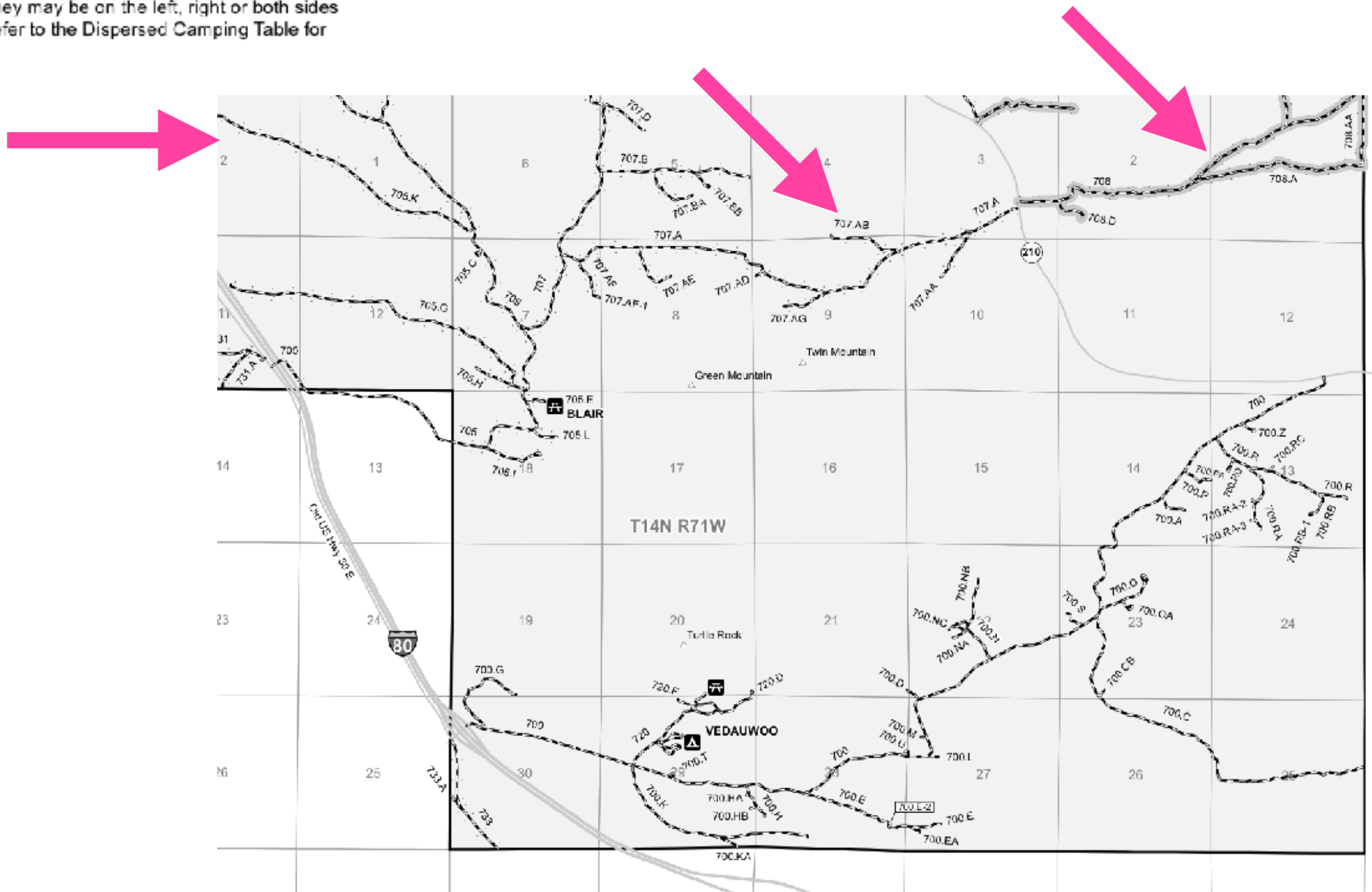


# Can I dispersed camp here? MVUM Maps

## Dispersed Camping:



This symbol is used along with a designated road or trail to indicate limited cross-country motor vehicle use within a specific distance of that route, solely for the purpose of dispersed camping. The dots indicate where this activity is permitted. They may be on the left, right or both sides of the route. Refer to the Dispersed Camping Table for specifics.

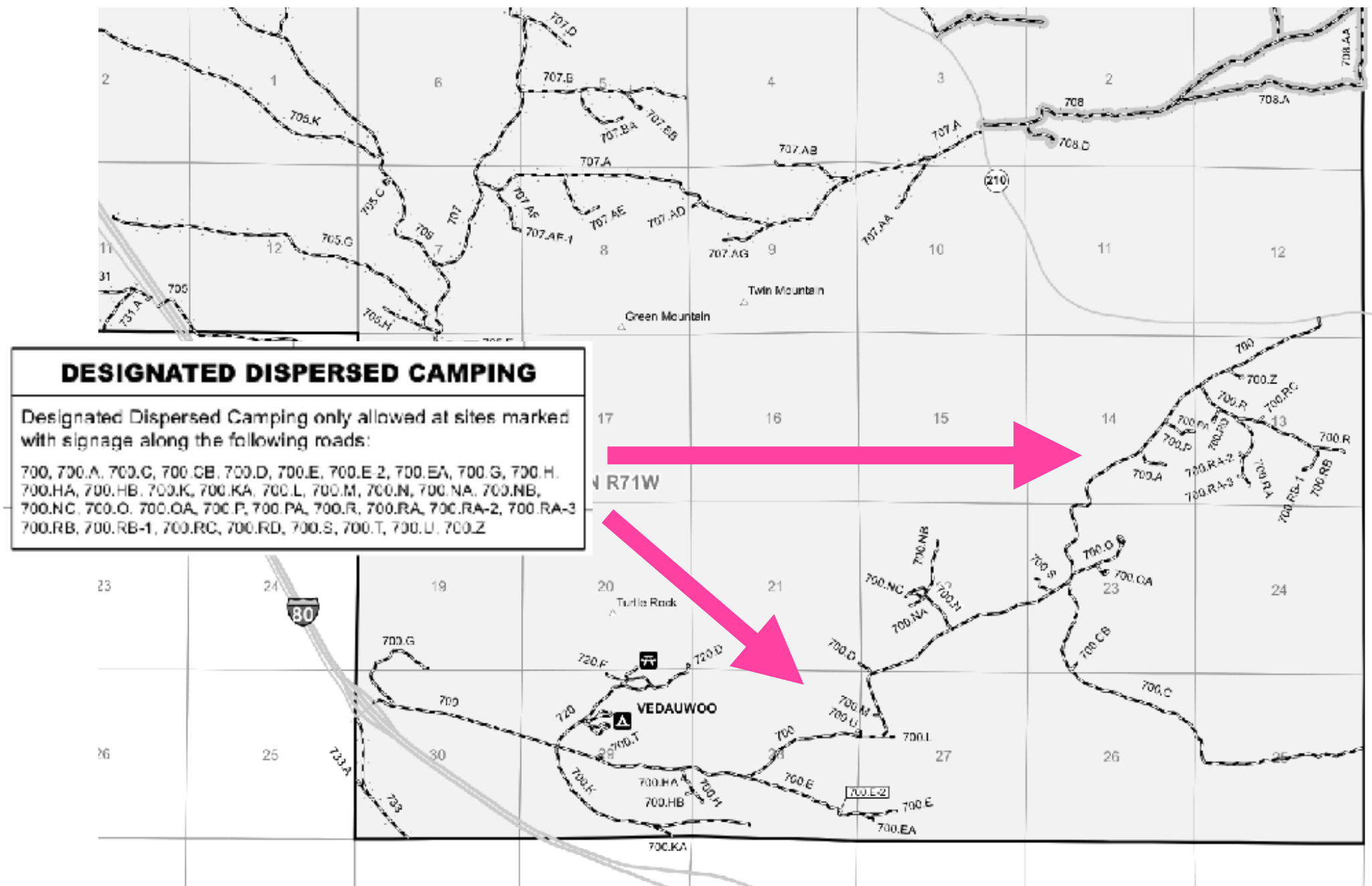


# Can I dispersed camp here? MVUM Maps

## Dispersed Camping:

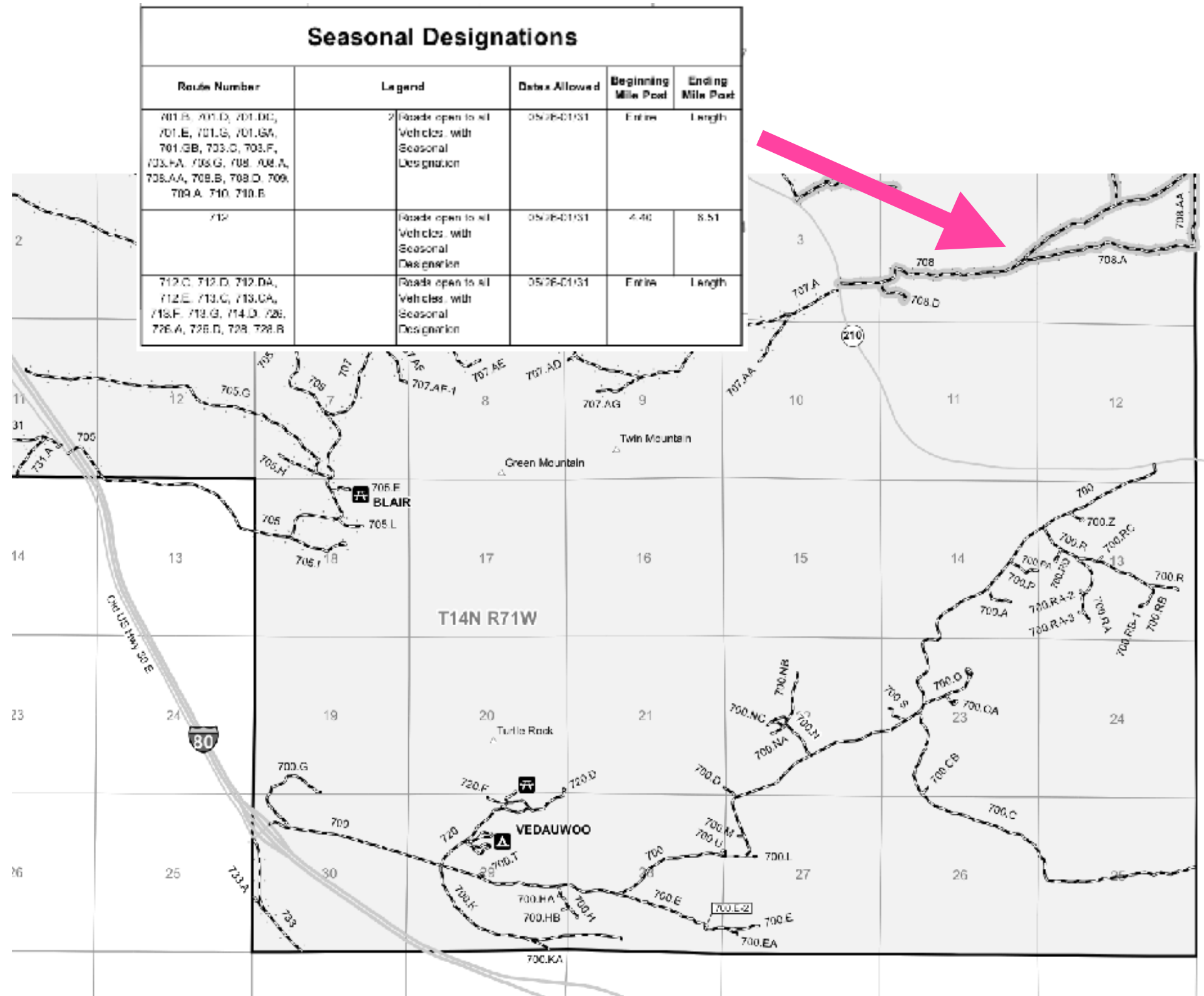


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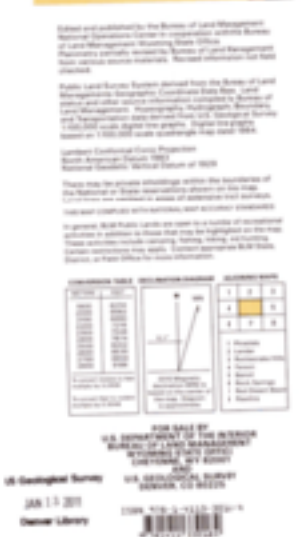




# Can I dispersed camp here? MVUM Maps





[illegible][illegible]

### NOTES TO MAP USERS

This product was compiled using the best available information at the time of publication. The publisher assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for any consequences arising from the use of the information contained herein. The publisher does not warrant the accuracy or completeness of the information, and the user assumes all responsibility for its use. The publisher is not responsible for any loss or damage, or for any consequences arising from the use of the information contained herein. The publisher is not responsible for any loss or damage, or for any consequences arising from the use of the information contained herein.





**Does all of that matter?**





**Does all of that matter?**





**Not Wilderness**

**Wilderness**  
(no mechanized travel)

**Does all of that matter?**







# Scouting Sites

## Step 4

# Before Leaving

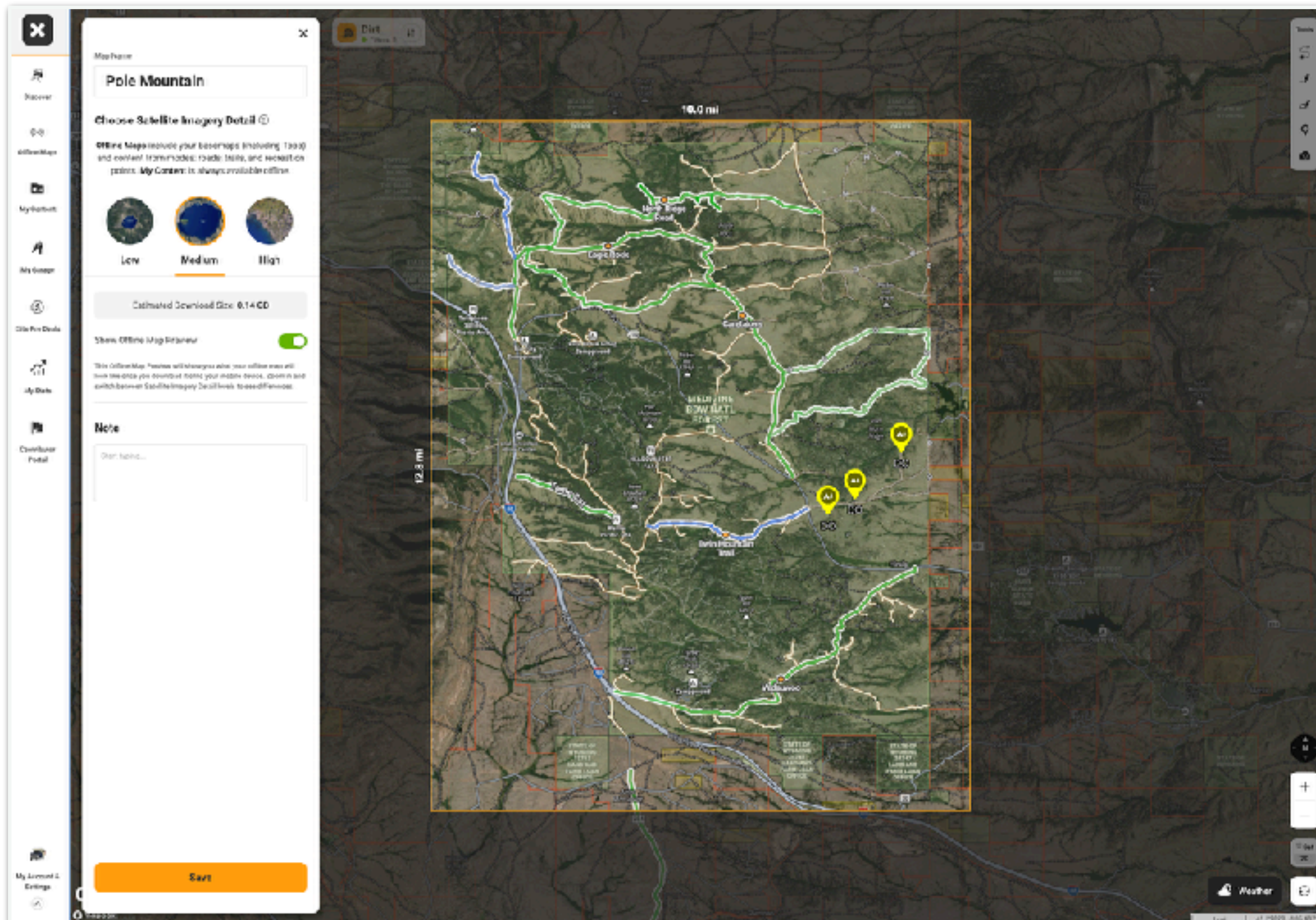
## Step 4

- **Check weather** a few days before you leave: temperatures, precipitation, wind, snow
- Download **offline maps** on at least 2 devices (have a backup)
- **Share your itinerary** with at least 2 people (especially if remote)
- **Adjust** preparation as needed (routes, clothing, ...)



# Before Leaving

## Step 4: Download Offline Maps





# Picking A Site: Scouting

## Step 5

**Scouting:** The act (and art) of evaluating a site to determine if you like it and it meets your needs





# What type of site?

## Step 5



### “Basic Hotel Room”

A clean, safe place to sleep  
before moving on tomorrow



THE RITZ-CARLTON®

### “Fancy Resort”

A beautiful site by a river with  
mountain views, trees for  
hammocks, and nearby biking  
trails

# Picking A Site: Scouting Tips

## Step 5

- “**Drop a pin**” as your drive and see new options
- **Stop and walking around** at potential sites (and take a break)
- Drive down **spur roads** to see what’s around the corner
- Send a **scout vehicle** when traveling in a group
- Scout **on foot with a radio** to avoid unnecessary challenging driving



# Scouting: Using OnX Offroad Mobile



# Picking A Site: Considerations

## Step 5

- Sufficient **space** for vehicle(s) and people without causing damage
- **Proximity** to other campers
- The **view**
- Potential for **wind**
- Ground **level and terrain** (ex rocky, muddy, ...)
- **Fire ring**
- **Distance to POIs**: hiking, biking, padding, ...
- Playground equipment (for the kids of course)



**Things won't always go as  
expected...**

**Communicate**

**+**

**Be Flexible**

**+**

**Have Patience**

# Picking A Site: Choosing

## Step 5

- Over time, you'll feel more comfortable scouting and **“intuiting”** when you found an awesome site
- Have a **deadline for finding a site** (ex by 5pm, so we have 2 hours of daylight for hanging out and cooking) and start adjusting by mid afternoon if needed
- You can always find a better site tomorrow







# Camping Responsibly

## Leave It Better





# Questions?

# Dispersed Camping Resource Guide

A free guide with my recommendations

Get a copy of these slides and links to my recommendations for mapping software, maps, trail descriptions, and more.



<https://journey-labs.ck.page/expodispersed>