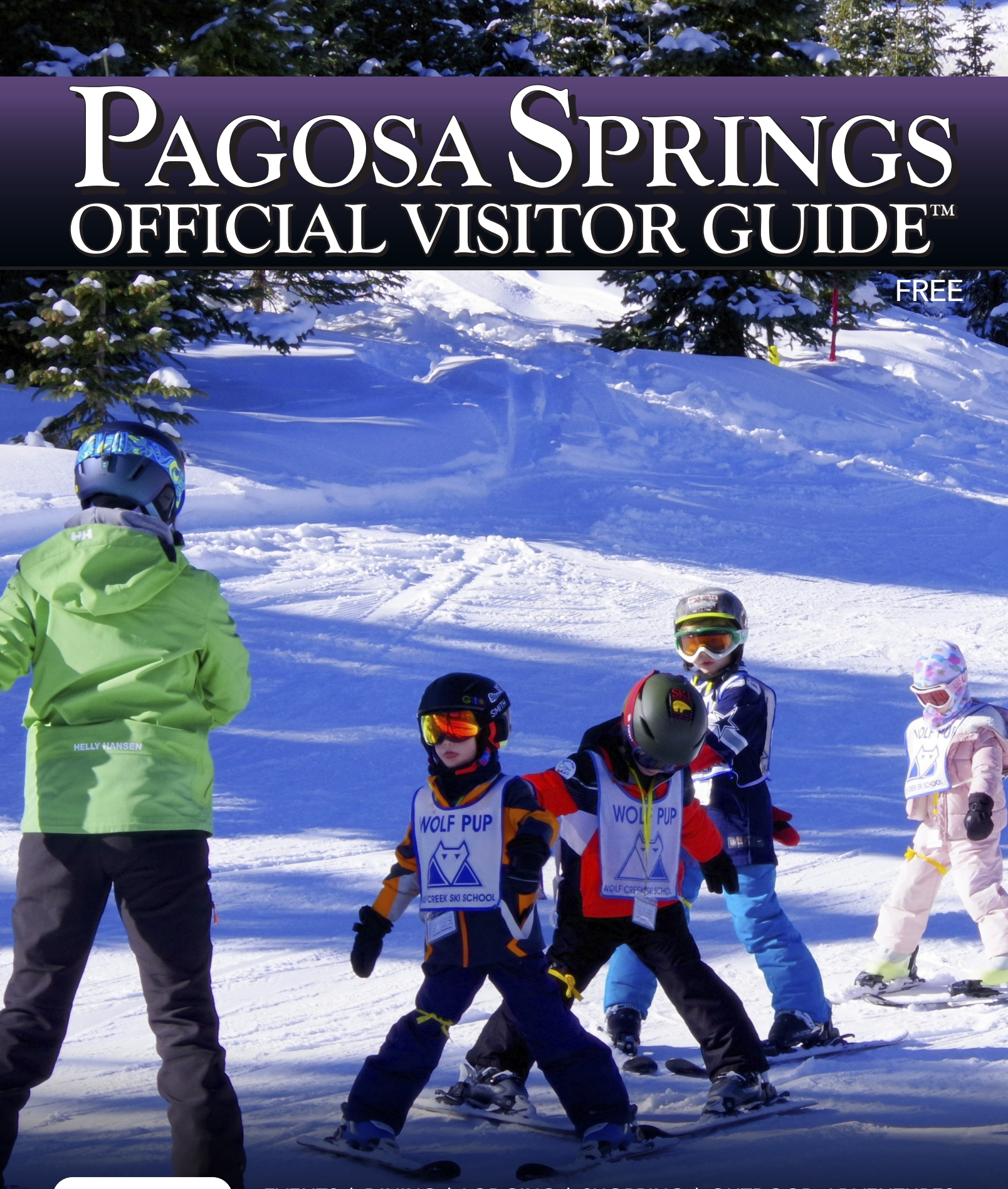
PAGOSA SPRINGS OFFICIAL VISITOR GUIDE™

FREE



EVENTS | DINING | LODGING | SHOPPING | OUTDOOR ADVENTURES
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT | MAPS | FAMILY FUN | HISTORY & MORE

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WINTER 2025-2026 • A PUBLICATION OF THE PAGOSA SPRINGS SUN

The Pagosa Way

Life Well Lived.

We are parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles. We are outdoor lovers and community volunteers. We live here, we play here, we've raised our families here. And we have been the area's #1 Real Estate Company for over 19 years. We hope you'll get to know us . . . we'd love to earn your business.

Scan For Property Details & Agent Information

Statistics Based On MLS Volume Sales Data,
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Featured Listings

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130-Acre Equestrian Ranch
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$3,995,000 (824275)

624/200 Morning Glory

14 Acres - 6 BR/6 BA + Apt.
Big Views - 2 Heated Shops
$2,650,000 (824840)

207 La Tierra Court

5 Acres - 6,630 SF - 5BR/6 BA
Beautiful Finishes - Views
$1,895,000 (819653)

120 Glen Eaton Drive

3,032 SF - Modern Mtn. Luxury
6-car Garage/RV Door
$1,498,000 (825931)

2554 County Road 400

10.6 Acres - Breathtaking Views
Remodeled Home/700 SF Shop
$1,495,000 (827506)

976 Hersch Avenue

10+ Acres - 2,700 SF Home
Plus 6,665 SF Barndominium
$1,495,000 (825063)

133 W Arbol Park Drive

3+ Acres - Custom 3,573 SF
Views - Comm. Hot Springs
$1,199,000 (825049)

171 Glen Eaton Drive

4,409 SF - Mtn. & Lake Views
Eaton Estates - 4 BR + Huge Loft
$1,175,000 (828810)

2913 Meadows Drive

5+ Acres - Meadows 4
3,542 SF Home + Shop
$995,000 (828765)

531 Whispering Wood

17+ Acres - 2,106 SF Home
2 BR + Loft - 4-car Garage
$995,000 (828088)

1434 Meadows Drive

5+ Acres - 2,253 SF Home
Mountain Views - Solar
$949,900 (822743)

521 Spring Creek Circle

3 Acres - 2,968 SF - Shop
Mountain/Lake Views
$968,500 (811462)

291 Buck Drive

3 Acres - 2,984 SF - Big Views
Large Garage - RV Hook-up
$849,000 (828406)

446 Henry's Lake

3 Acres - Mountain Views
1,890 SF - Heated Garage
$836,000 (829135)

75 Pebble Circle

Lakefront Home - 3,225 SF
2 Primary Suites - Private Deck
$799,000 (827219)

Lot 11 Hidden Valley Drive

35-Acres - Views - Gated
55-Acre Private Lake
$695,000 (826865)

33 E Nebo Court

1,990 SF - 3 BR/2 BA - Large Lot
Steps From Nat'l Forest
$665,000 (828572)

285 Beaver Circle

Walk To Boat Ramp
3 BR/2 BA - Over Half Acre
$585,000

502 5th Street

Riverfront Furnished Condo
2 BR/2 BA - End Unit
$525,000 (828328)

558 Henry's Lake Drive

3 Acres - Big Views
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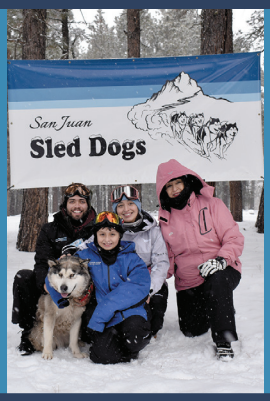

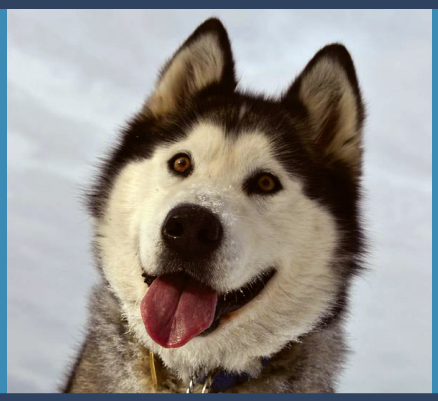

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- Meet the Dogs experience also available

San Juan Sled Dogs

970-507-0316

SanJuanSledDogs.com

sanjuansleddogs

Peter@sanjuansleddogs.com

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CLAYTON CHANEY

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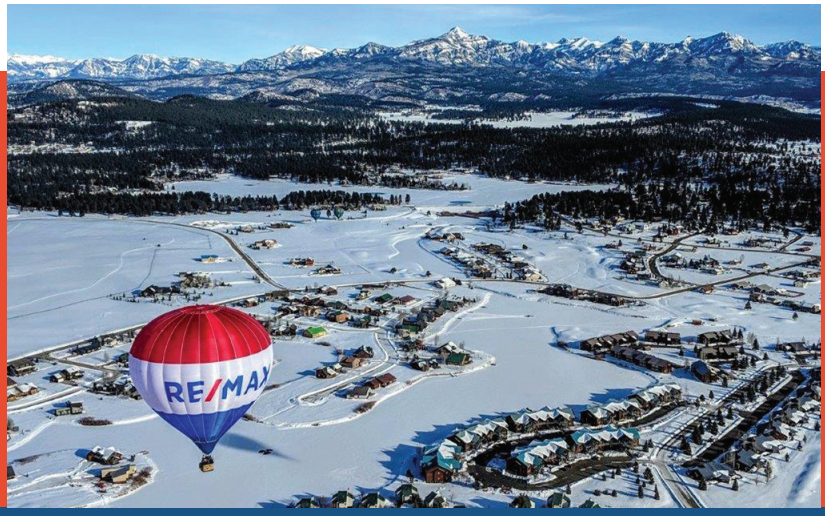

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Properties are selling and our inventory is still low. Ready to sell your home? We can help with that too. Give us a call now or click the QR code to see a quick estimate on your home's value.

Welcome

If you're planning your first visit to Pagosa Country, rest assured you will enjoy an incredible environment — one full of outdoor recreational opportunities the likes of which are rarely duplicated; one where our unique amenities in this paradise of geothermal waters, flowing mountain streams and alpine delights will satisfy your every need.

If you are returning to Pagosa Country, what you enjoyed during previous visits remains, and there is even more to sample when you arrive.

When you are in Pagosa Country, you are in magnificent surroundings. Your task is to determine what you will do once you are here.

Snow turns this part of the world into a winter playground with few peers — a remarkably beautiful alpine environment in which outdoor recreation option is maximized. Alpine skiers, snowboarders, showshoers, cross-country skiers, fat bikers, snowmobilers, sledders, skaters — all benefit from being in Pagosa Country for a day, for a week or for the season. And our local businesses can outfit you for any winter pursuit. Don't miss the chance to indulge your passion for outdoor recreation; you are at the heart of it all. Of the best of it all.

When winter comes and the snow falls from the clouds, we are ready in other ways to that ensure you have a memorable visit. We boast, for example, one of the area's premier theater companies, incredibly talented locals and a number of art galleries. Our local business community — lodging establishments, entertainment venues, outdoor recreation equipment sales and rental outlets, clothing stores, and restaurants — are ready to welcome you and provide you with all you need.

Indulge the pleasure of soaking in our geothermally heated waters. The giant spring in town issues forth from a mighty aquifer, providing Pagosa Country with some of the most relaxing and restorative waters anywhere in the world.

Finally, know that Pagosa's variety of dining establishments offer a range of cuisines and prices to fuel your adventures, help you wind down after a day adventuring in the great outdoors, celebrate a special occasion or just enjoy some delicious fare.

Welcome to Pagosa Country. Have a wonderful time.

RANDI PIERCE

Road construction

Pagosa Springs is undergoing a major downtown road reconstruction project.

The project is replacing the existing asphalt with concrete, widening many sidewalks, adding street lights and trees, building bike lanes and creating safer crosswalks.

While the investment is needed and will improve the downtown, the work may cause delays when traveling through the area while construction is active. During the project, traffic will continue to flow through town, with one lane moving in each direction. During the busiest times, drivers and pedestrians may experience occasional delays.

Businesses will be open during construction, with parking available on side streets and in public parking lots.

For the latest updates, download the Visit Pagosa Springs app or visit www.visitpagosasprings.com.

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App & Plan
Your Perfect Visit

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Where is Pagosa Springs?

Pagosa Springs sits at 7,079 feet in southwest Colorado at the base of the Continental Divide. Featuring rushing rivers and streams, lakes galore, hiking and biking trails, spectacular fall colors, ancient ruins, deep powder in the winter at nearby Wolf Creek Ski Area, incredible hunting, amazing wildlife, clean air and 3 million acres of National Forest surrounding the area, Pagosa Springs offers plenty of opportunities for our valued visitors, any time of year.

Who can I contact for info?

The Pagosa Springs Area Tourism website, www.visitpagosasprings.com, will link you to the Visitor Center, or call the vacation line at (866) 438-4917. Visitor information can also be found at www.ExplorePagosa.com and www.PagosaSUN.com. Keep up on the news and events with The Pagosa Springs SUN, the community's weekly newspaper, and at www.PagosaSUN.com.

What is it like at that altitude?

Regardless of physical fitness, acute mountain sickness can strike anyone not acclimated to Pagosa's 7,000-foot elevation. To guard against altitude sickness:

- Drink 3 to 4 quarts of water per day.
- Avoid overexertion and keep caffeine and alcohol intake moderate for the first few days.
- Seek medical attention if persistent headache, fatigue, poor coordination or shortness of breath occur.

What is the weather like?

Archuleta County is located in the "Colorado Sunbelt," just north of the New Mexico border and along the Western slope of the Continental Divide. This combination of high-desert plateau and dramatic Rocky Mountains to the north and east creates an unusually mild climate compared with much of the surrounding Southwest. We are favored with some 300 days of sun each year, as well as four distinct seasons. With low wind and warm sunshine, residents can enjoy a variety of year-round recreational activities.

Average temperatures and precipitation:

Average Days of Sunshine: 300 per year

Annual Precipitation: 21.66 inches/year

Annual Snowfall: 116.4 inches/year

Month	High	Low	Precip.	Month	High	Low	Precip.
Jan.	37.4°F	1.4°F	2.09″	Jul.	82.7°F	45.0°F	2.01″
Feb.	42.0°F	7.0°F	1.76″	Aug.	80.0°F	44.4°F	2.70″
Mar.	48.5°F	15.6°F	1.94″	Sep.	73.5°F	36.4°F	1.98″
Apr.	58.6°F	23.7°F	1.34″	Oct.	63.1°F	26.3°F	2.27″
May	67.9°F	30.1°F	1.26″	Nov.	49.0°F	15.4°F	1.56″
Jun.	78.1°F	36.1°F	.89″	Dec.	39.5°F	4.9°F	1.85″

Is there a medical facility?

Pagosa Springs Medical Center includes a critical access hospital located at 95 S. Pagosa Blvd. The emergency room is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Phone (970) 731-3700. Dial 911 for emergency services.

There are also multiple primary care clinics in the community offering a variety of services, including urgent care.

Important phone numbers

EMERGENCIES DIAL "911" (ambulance, EMT, fire, police)

Nonemergency ambulance, fire, EMT or law enforcement, dial (970) 731-2160

Emergency Medical Services	(970) 731-5811
Pagosa Springs Medical Center	(970) 731-3700
Pagosa Urgent Care	(970) 372-0456
Axis Integrated Healthcare	(970) 264-2104
Pagosa Springs Police Department	(970) 264-4151, Ext. 228
Archuleta County Sheriff's Office	(970) 264-8430
Pagosa Fire Protection District	(970) 731-4191
USFS Pagosa District Ranger	(970) 264-2268
Pagosa Springs Town Hall	(970) 264-4151
Archuleta County Commissioners	(970) 264-8300
The Pagosa Springs SUN	(970) 264-2100
Pagosa Springs Post Office	(970) 264-5440
Pagosa Senior Center	(970) 264-2167
Ruby M. Sisson Memorial Library	(970) 264-2209
Archuleta School District 50 Jt.	(970) 264-2228
Navajo Lake State Park	(970) 883-2208
Airport Flight Base Operations	(970) 731-2127
Pagosa Area Water and Sanitation District	(970) 731-2691
Black Hills Energy	(888) 890-5554
La Plata Electric Association	(970) 247-5786

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SHARI PIERCE

Pagosa Springs

For more than a century, Pagosa Country has enchanted visitors with its stunning natural beauty.

Snow-covered mountain peaks, clear blue skies and healing mineral waters captivate guests who cannot help but be charmed by the relaxed, friendly atmosphere of life in the San Juan Mountains.

The elements that contribute to Pagosa Country's magic are many: wild game, stately timbers, lush valleys, sparkling rivers, scenic seclusion and the craggy peaks of the rugged San Juans.

Unlike so many modern "retreats" in the Rockies, Pagosa Country doesn't offer everything money can buy, but it does offer countless things money can't buy.

Leave the hustle and bustle of city living and the glitz of Rocky Mountain resort towns — escape to Pagosa Springs.

Basic services abound

Pagosa Springs has everything guests and residents need to be entertained and accommodated. A public library, art galleries, museums, theaters, numerous restaurants and a variety of specialty shops provide plenty of opportunities for amusement while you're not out enjoying the natural landscapes the area offers.

Churches, gas stations, grocery stores, hotels, motels, private rentals, and public and private health care facilities are also available to fill any need.

Information available

Head to the Visitor Center for directions and information on all Pagosa has to offer. Located on the right side of Hot Springs Boulevard just after you cross the bridge over the San Juan River, the Visitor Center, which is designed to represent one of Pagosa Springs' early-day bathhouses, offers a wealth of information.

With a knowledgeable staff familiar with the ins and outs of Pagosa, the Visitor Center is the place to go for questions, concerns, tips and advice, as well as pamphlets, maps and brochures for the area's events, destinations and other attractions.

World's deepest hot spring

A short walk south from the Visitor Center will take you to "The Great Pagosa Hot Spring" — certified by the Guinness Book of World Records as the deepest geothermal hot spring in the world. From the Visitor Center, follow the sidewalk down Hot Springs Boulevard until you're southwest of The Springs Resort and Spa and follow the paved path to the right.

Outdoor activities

Pagosa Springs is overflowing with opportunities to engage in outdoor adventures.

To help you find the best places to enjoy your favorite activities, stop by the U.S. Forest Service's Pagosa Ranger District Office at the corner of 2nd and Pagosa streets or visit fs.usda.gov/r02/sanjuan. Both resources can provide a wealth of information on all manner of seasonal activities, including hunting, area ski or snowshoeing routes, snowmobiling, winter camping opportuni-

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CONNOR THOMAS

ties, ice fishing, rafting, hiking and horseback riding.

For the area's earliest native inhabitants, Pagosa was considered a land of healing waters. For today's vacationers, Pagosa Country is a land of invigorating experiences, from the depths of the healing pools to the mountains and valleys that beckon enthusiasts year-round.

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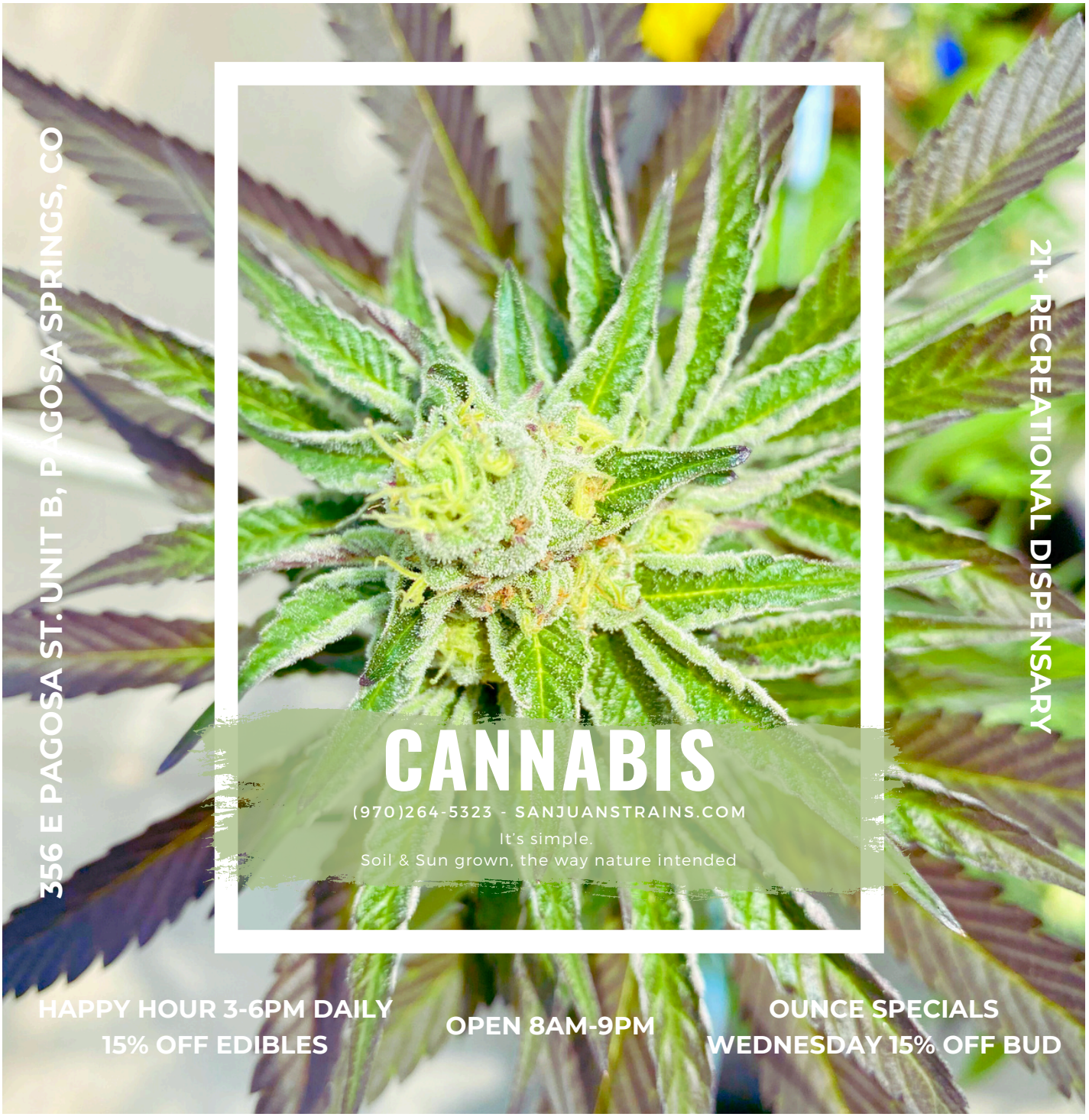
SAN JUAN STRAINS™

LIVING SOIL - NATURAL SUNLIGHT



Local event calendar

Check The Pagosa Springs SUN and www.pagosasun.com for up-to-date event information.

November

Nov. 20
"How the Grinch Stole Christmas"
7 p.m., Pagosa Springs High School auditorium
Presented by Curtains Up Pagosa.
curtainsuppagosa.org

Nov. 21
"How the Grinch Stole Christmas"
7 p.m., Pagosa Springs High School auditorium
Presented by Curtains Up Pagosa.
curtainsuppagosa.org

Nov. 22
"How the Grinch Stole Christmas"
2 p.m., Pagosa Springs High School auditorium
Presented by Curtains Up Pagosa.
curtainsuppagosa.org

"How the Grinch Stole Christmas"
7 p.m., Pagosa Springs High School auditorium
Presented by Curtains Up Pagosa.
curtainsuppagosa.org

December

Dec. 12-27
"A Christmas Carol"
Pagosa Springs Center for the Arts
Presented by Thingamajig Theatre Company. See website for schedule.
(970) 731-SHOW, pagosacenter.org

Dec. 4
Festival of Trees Public Viewing
Noon-6 p.m., Ross Aragon Community Center
pagosasprings.co.gov

Dec. 5
Festival of Trees
5:30 p.m., Ross Aragon Community Center
pagosasprings.co.gov

Dec. 12
Pagosa Springs Community Choir Christmas Concert
7 p.m., Pagosa Springs High School auditorium
singpagosa.org

Dec. 13
Pagosa Springs Community Choir Christmas Concert
7 p.m., Pagosa Springs High School auditorium
singpagosa.org

Dec. 14
Pagosa Springs Community Choir Christmas Concert
4 p.m., Pagosa Springs High School auditorium
singpagosa.org

Dec. 20
Old Fashioned Christmas Celebration
5-7 p.m., Riverwalk
Celebrate the holiday season at this annual event centered around an old-fashioned Christmas theme and the spirit of giving.
(970) 585-1200
visitpagosasprings.com

January

Jan. 2
Moonrise Cross-Country Ski Social
5 p.m., Cloman Park
www.pagosanordic.com

Jan. 10
Southwest Nordic Race Series: Cabin Fever Nordic Race
9 a.m., Cloman Park
Competitive 20 km, citizens 5k and KidK races. A great spectator event.
PagosaNordic.com

Jan. 11
Learn to Cross-Country Ski Clinic
10 a.m., Cloman Park
Skate ski and classic cross-country ski lessons for never-evers, beginners and intermediates. Registration required.
PagosaNordic.com.

Jan. 16
WinterFest Bonfire
5 p.m., Archuleta County Fairgrounds
Bonfire, Battle of the Soups, live music and more.
pagosachamber.com

Jan. 17
Skijoring
Archuleta County Fairgrounds
pagosachamber.com

WinterFest Hot Air Balloon Mass Ascension
8 a.m.
(970) 264-2360, pagosachamber.com

WinterFest Red Ryder BB Gun Biathlon
9 a.m., Yamaguchi Park
16k competitive (9 a.m.), 4k citizens/youth (10 a.m.) and KidK (11 a.m.) races. An excellent spectator event.
PagosaNordic.com

Penguin Plunge
1 p.m., Riverwalk along the San Juan River
Watch daring volunteers plunge in the river to raise money for their favorite charity.
(970) 264-2360, pagosachamber.com

Sledz on Rez
2 p.m., Reservoir Hill
Watch homemade sleds race down Reservoir Hill.
buildpagosa.org

Jan. 18
Skijoring
Archuleta County Fairgrounds
pagosachamber.com

WinterFest Hot Air Balloon Mass Ascension
8 a.m.
(970) 264-2360, pagosachamber.com

WinterFest Learn to Cross-Country Ski Clinic
10 a.m., Cloman Park
Skate ski and classic cross-country ski lessons for never-evers, beginners and intermediates. Registration required.
PagosaNordic.com.

Jan. 23
"Art"

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204 East Pagosa Street
Pagosa Springs, Colorado

7 p.m., Pagosa Springs Center for the Arts
Presented by Thingamajig Theatre Company.
(970) 731-SHOW, pagosacenter.org

Jan. 24
"Art"
7 p.m., Pagosa Springs Center for the Arts
Presented by Thingamajig Theatre Company.
(970) 731-SHOW, pagosacenter.org

Jan. 30
Moonrise Cross-Country Ski Social
5:30 p.m., Cloman Park
pagosanordic.com

February

Feb. 13-28
"Art"
Pagosa Springs Center for the Arts
Presented by Thingamajig Theatre Company. See website for schedule.
(970) 731-SHOW, www.pagosacenter.org

Feb. 1
Learn to Cross-Country Ski Clinic
10 a.m., Cloman Park
Skate ski and classic cross-country ski lessons for never-evers, beginners and intermediates. Registration required.
PagosaNordic.com

Feb. 27
Moonrise Cross-Country Ski Social
6 p.m., Cloman Park
www.PagosaNordic.com

March

March 13-15
"Art"
Pagosa Springs Center for the Arts
Presented by Thingamajig Theatre Company. See website for performance schedule.
(970) 731-SHOW, www.pagosacenter.org

RANDI PIERCE

ABOUT THE AREA

Physical description

Archuleta County is comprised of 872,960 acres. Only 34 percent of lands in Archuleta County are in private ownership. Tribal lands comprise 14.4 percent of the county. Most of the northern and eastern portions of the county (51.6 percent) are within the San Juan National Forest. There is a total of approximately 2.8 million acres of National Forest and Bureau of Land Management surrounding Archuleta County.

Geography

Land area (square miles) — 1,350
Persons per square mile — 9.9

Housing and Income

Median value owner-occupied housing — $432,400
Households — 5,738
Persons per household — 2.32
Per capita money income — $39,155
Median household income — $66,813
Persons in poverty — 9.8 percent

Population

Source: US Census Bureau State & County QuickFacts
2023 estimate — 14,189

Utilities

Electric
La Plata Electric Association, (970) 247-5786, www.lpea.coop
Gas/Natural
Black Hills Energy, (888) 890-5554, www.blackhillsenergy.com
Propane
Arrowhead Propane, (970) 582-3225
Basin Coop, (970) 247-3066
Inter-Mountain Propane, (970) 264-1301
Ferrellgas, (888) 337-7355
Water
Pagosa Area Water & Sanitation, (970) 731-2691, www.pawsd.org
Sanitation
Pagosa Area Water & Sanitation, (970) 731-2691, www.pawsd.org
Town of Pagosa Springs, (970) 264-4151, www.pagosasprings.co.gov
Trash
Elite Recycling & Disposal, (970) 731-2012
Waste Management, (970) 264-5622
County Transfer Station, (970) 264-5660

Road conditions

Colorado Department of Transportation
511 or (303) 639-1111, www.cotrip.org
Archuleta County Road Report
(970) 264-5555
New Mexico Road Report
(800) 432-4269, www.nmroads.com

Taxes

Sales and User Tax: 2.9 percent state, 4 percent county. County sales tax revenue is divided between county and town.
Lodger's Tax: A 4.9 percent tax is collected from the lodging industry in town limits. The county collects a 2 percent tax for lodging. Lodging tax is used for tourism promotion, among other things.
Primary Source of Town & County Revenue: Retail sales taxes, property taxes and charges for services.

Government

Town Government:
www.pagosasprings.co.gov
Home Rule Municipality
Town council with elected mayor and six councilors elected for alternating four-year terms, town manager is appointed. Date of incorporation: 1891.
County Government:
www.archuletacounty.org.
Three county commissioners elected for alternating four-year terms.

Media

Newspaper: The Pagosa Springs SUN
www.pagosasun.com
(970) 264-2100

Education

District 50 Joint Office (970) 264-2228
www.mypagosaschools.com
High School (970) 264-2231
Middle School, 5th-6th grades (970) 264-2256
Middle School, 7th-8th grades (970) 264-2794
Elementary School (970) 264-2229
Pagosa Peak Open School (970) 317-2151
San Juan Mountain School (970) 264-2231, ext. 9247
The Training Advantage (970) 264-5627
GOAL Academy (877) PRO-GOAL

Tourism & business development

Pagosa Springs Community Development Corp.
www.pagosaspringscdc.org, (970) 264-2360
Pagosa Springs Area Chamber of Commerce
www.pagosaspringschamber.com, (970) 264-2360
Pagosa Springs Area Tourism
www.visitpagosasprings.com, www.explorepagosa.com
(970) 585-1200 or (866) 438-4917
Region 9 Economic Development District
(970) 247-9621, www.scan.org
Fort Lewis College Small Business Development
(970) 247-7009, http://sbdcfortlewis.org/

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SCOTT DW SMITH/WOLF CREEK SKI AREA

Wolf Creek Ski Area events

Nov. 5	Local Appreciation Day
Nov. 12	Local Appreciation Day
Nov. 19	Local Appreciation Day
Dec. 1-4	Local Appreciation Days
Dec. 6	Fun Race
Dec. 7	College Day
Dec. 8-11	Local Appreciation Days
Dec. 13-14	Skimo Mountaineering Race
Jan. 4	Fun Race
Jan. 11	Fun Race
Jan. 12	Ms. Mondays
Jan. 18	Martin Luther King Jr. Fun Race
Jan. 20	Forever Young Clinic
Jan. 21	United Way Day
Jan. 24	Camp Robbers and Raven Riders
Jan. 24	Challenge Series Giant Slalom Race
Jan. 25	College Day
Jan. 26	Ms. Mondays
Jan. 27	Tuesday Turns Clinic
Jan. 28	Local Appreciation Day
Jan. 31	Camp Robbers and Raven Riders
Feb. 3	Forever Young Clinic
Feb. 4	Local Appreciation Day
Feb. 7	Camp Robbers and Raven Riders
Feb. 8	Local Appreciation Day
Feb. 8	Olympian Fun Race
Feb. 9	Ms. Mondays
Feb. 10	Tuesday Turns Clinic
Feb. 15	Presidents Day Fun Race
Feb. 21	Camp Robbers and Raven Riders
Feb. 22	Fun Race
Feb. 24	Forever Young Clinic
March 1	College Day
March 7	Jane and Pitch Tribute Fun Race
March 14	St. Patrick's Day Fun Race
March 15	Spring Fling Fun Race
March 21	Ms. Mondays
March 22	College Day
March 24	Tuesday Turns Clinic
March 28	Fun Race
March 30	Ms. Mondays
March 30-31	Local Appreciation Days
March 31	Tuesday Turns Clinic
April 1-5	Local Appreciation Days
April 4	Challenge Series Super G

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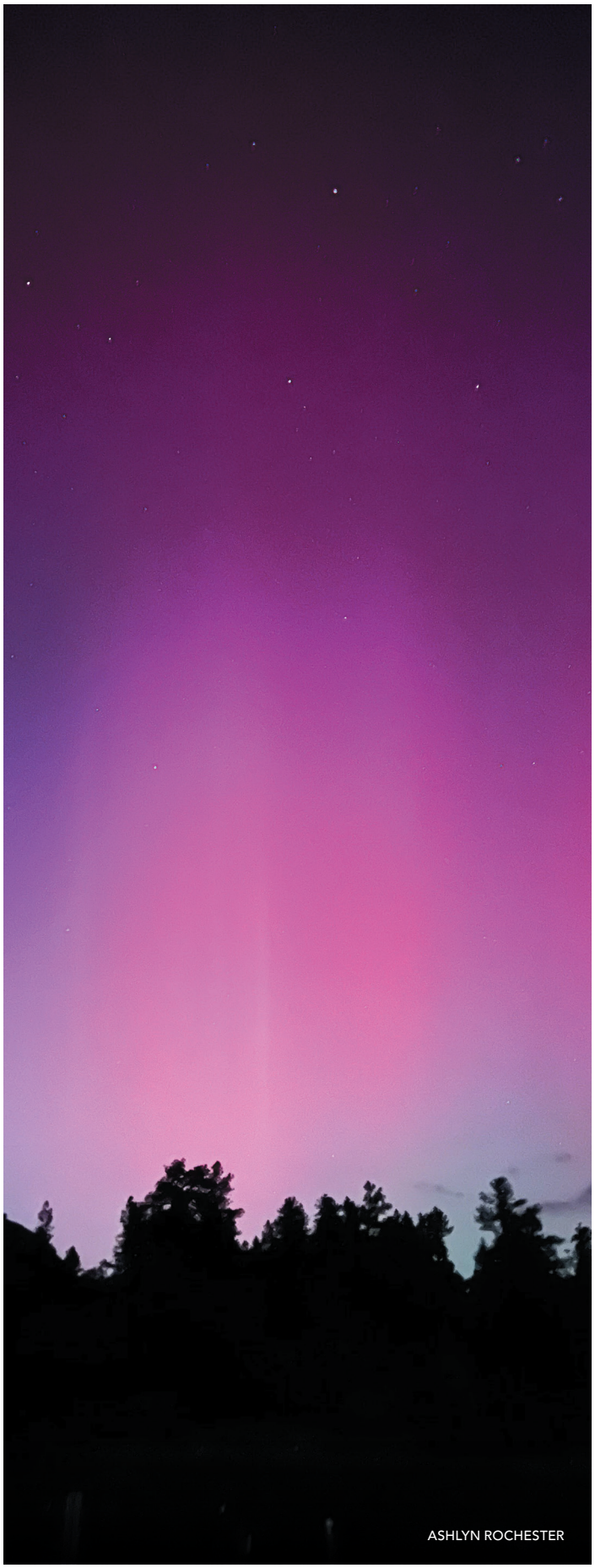
ASHLYN ROCHESTER

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Cover photo: Wolf Creek Ski Area

VISIT PAGOSA SPRINGS COLORADO
REFRESHINGLY AUTHENTIC

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PAGOSA
SPRINGS
COLORADO
Downtown Recreation Map
TOWN PARK
CENTENNIAL PARK
RESERVOIR HILL
TOUPTOWN DISTRICT
Trail Head
Parking
Visitor Center
Road or Highway
Graded Fall
Unpaved Trail
Pedestrian Bridge
Restroom
Picnic Area
Playground
Library
Museum
Post Office
School
Forest Service
Popular Parking Area
Wave Features
Mountain Biking
Disc Golf Course
Wind Hwy
Sports Complex & Skate Park
Park
Pines/Pond
Ice Skating
Sledding

RANDI PIERCE

WinterFest

WinterFest is an interactive festival perfect for the family, and WinterFest weekend is the time to visit Pagosa Springs. WinterFest 2026 is set for Jan. 16-18.

A magical part of the weekend is the colorful hot air balloons that grace the winter skies — weather permitting. The snowy white mountains and the crystal blue skies make for a stunning backdrop to the multicolored balloons. Bring your camera, dress warmly and capture the splendor as the balloons mass ascend on Jan. 17 and 18. The mass ascensions will take place from various locations in town.

The weekend kicks off on Jan. 16 with a blaze — a huge bonfire, that is. What better way to offset the cold of January than a super-sized bonfire accompanied by live music, food vendors, a beer garden and hot beverages, and the Battle of the Soups? Entrance to the event located at the Archuleta County Fairgrounds just south on U.S. 84 and Mill Creek Road, is free. The festivities will begin about 5 p.m.

Returning this year will be the popular skijoring event, which will be held Jan. 17 and 18. Watch horses pull skiers and snowboarders through an obstacle course as they compete for prizes and awards. There will even be a time when youngsters can try out the course via a slower method than the horses. This fast-paced activity is a very popular sport to watch.

Another highlight is the Penguin Plunge, where hardy participants jump into the frigid San Juan River (approximately 32 degrees) as they raise money for their favorite nonprofit organization. The event takes place on Saturday around 1 p.m. in front of the Visitor Center, where the plungers float down the river a bit and then go over "Davey's Wave" for a full-body experience. Spectators can view the antics from the Riverwalk.

Continue on with the festivities in the downtown area as you watch the Sledz on Rez Race, hosted by the Build Pagosa construction vocational group. Homemade sleds "race" down Reservoir Hill, located downtown, on Saturday afternoon. Materials such as wheelbarrows, kayaks or a crate are joined with skis or snowboards for imaginative sled creations. The crowd jeers and cheers as the sledders wield their way down the hill as they compete for prizes such as the fastest time or best-decorated sled.

For the athletically inclined, there are several activities to participate in over the weekend. The Pagosa Nordic Club will host the Red Ryder BB Gun Biathlon on Jan. 17. This event offers participants a cross-country course to fit your skill level. There will be 16 km competitive, 4 km citizens, and kid courses. Each skier shoots at targets, with BB guns provided, three times between ¼ ski distances. This is a great spectator event if competing isn't your style.

Then, on Jan. 18, a Learn to Ski XC Ski Clinic will be held at Cloman Park. This clinic typically fills up, so make reservations early at PagosaNordic.com.

Be sure to check The Pagosa Springs SUN and www.PagosaSUN.com for up-to-date information closer to event time, as well as more events that may be added onto the weekend. As WinterFest activities are subject to Mother Nature, all events are contingent upon weather conditions, including the launching of the balloons.

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RANDI PIERCE

Family fun

Of all the descriptions usually applied to Pagosa Country, "family friendly" ranks among the most treasured by visitors and locals alike.

While winter's snowy brush paints a picture that pleases the child in all of us, with the town taking on a magical quality as if suddenly populated by gingerbread houses covered with icing, it's not just the postcard-perfect landscape that gives the area a family-friendly reputation. It's the myriad fun activities available for all ages that have made Pagosa Country a favorite family destination for decades.

Pagosa Country businesses and nonprofits work hard to pull out all the stops to keep the whole family having fun, entertained and well-fed year-round.

With freshly plowed roads forcing us to slow down and appreciate the view, a quick glance reveals numerous slopes for sledding or getting little legs accustomed to skis or a snowboard, and meadow trails for skiing and snowshoeing.

A traditional local hot spot for a downhill thrill is Reservoir Hill (downtown, just behind The Healing Waters Resort and Spa on the east side of Hot Springs Boulevard). Unless a spell of dry weather has brought out brown patches (with over 300 sunny days a year on average, not an unheard-of condition in the Pagosa area), the slopes promise a good time for kids of all ages.

Parents hoping to spend a day on the more substantial slopes at Wolf Creek Ski Area can enroll children ages 5 to 8 in the Wolf Pups ski school or Wolf Rider board school and kids ages 9 to 12 in one of multiple options for skiing or boarding based on experience level. Details and prices on ski school programs can be found at wolfcreekski.com. Equipment rental is not included in the ski school price.

Those looking to stay slightly lower in elevation can glide across frozen water, with the pond at The River Center Park open for skating from mid-December through mid-February. To check conditions and hear if ponds are open, call the Pagosa Springs Sports Hotline, (970) 264-4151, ext. 301.

There are also a number of events that take place throughout the winter season that make for great family fun and entertainment, including WinterFest.

For those with an aversion to the white stuff and cold air, Pagosa Springs offers several indoor alternatives certain to please those not inclined to slap boards on their feet for the purpose of sliding down a mountain.

Of course, the bookish will want to seek out the Ruby M. Sisson Memorial Library at 811 San Juan St. (on the southeast corner of 8th Street and U.S. 160). With a wide selection of children's, young adult and adult fiction, as well as nonfiction, reference audiobooks and DVDs, the library offers visitor library cards for those wanting to take some books or a movie back for curling up with next to a warm fire. While there, free Internet and computer use are available. The library also offers programs for adults and children throughout the year — check a copy of The Pagosa Springs SUN (www.pagosasun.com), call the library at (970) 264-2208 or visit pagosalibrary.org for program times and

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schedules.

The Ross Aragon Community Center, which is also home to the Pagosa Senior Center, at 451 Hot Springs Blvd. offers programs for young and old alike. From bridge to yoga, pick-up basketball games to mahjong, the center is open to the public, and many programs and classes are free.

Thingamajig Theatre Company, an award-winning theater company in residence at the Pagosa Springs Center for the Arts, will be putting on multiple shows over the winter, including "Master Class," "Beetlejuice Jr.," "A Christmas Carol," "Elf Jr." and "Art." For more information and tickets, visit www.pagosa-center.org.

Finally, during that most magical time of year, plenty of holiday events take place. Among these are visits with Santa around town, the Festival of Trees, an Old Fashioned Christmas Celebration, and numerous holiday music and theater events.

Pagosa's long-running community theater group, Curtains Up Pagosa, will present "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" Nov. 20-22 to help kick off the holiday season with a family-friendly presentation of a classic tale.

The annual Festival of Trees, a fundraiser for local nonprofit organizations, includes two main events on Dec. 4 and 5 — a public viewing and auction. The fundraiser features lavishly decorated trees put forward by local nonprofits to earn public votes, a chance at making the live auction, with the proceeds going back to the nonprofits.

The festive entertainment will continue when the Pagosa Springs Community Choir presents its annual Christmas concerts, a cherished local tradition, Dec. 12-14, with the year's theme being "We Need a Little Christmas."

In its fifth year as part of the community's holiday lineup this year will be Old Fashioned Christmas Celebration, a collaborative event between the Town of Pagosa Springs and The Pagosa Springs SUN. This year's celebration will be Saturday, Dec. 20, from 5 to 7 p.m. along the Riverwalk in downtown Pagosa Springs. The magical evening will be a walking "parade" to celebrate the holiday season and will center around the theme of an old-fashioned Christmas and the spirit of giving. The event will be held outdoors. There will be multiple entry points along the route in order to ease congestion. Area nonprofits, church groups, businesses, musicians and more will be participating in this magical evening.

Check The PREVIEW section of The Pagosa Springs SUN (www.pagosasun.com) or visit the calendar of events at www.pagosasun.com for up-to-date information and details on the happenings in Pagosa Springs.

RANDI PIERCE

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Photos courtesy Austin DeGarmo

Visitors and ice rink users — We are taking the winter off to focus on a new facility to enhance your ice skating experience.

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For more information on our expansion project at South Yamaguchi Park, go to skatepagosa.org.

For information on making contributions to our expansion project, email skatepagosa@icloud.com

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PagosaWildlifePark.com

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CLAYTON CHANEY

Something for everyone

Whatever your soul seeks — skiing, snowboarding, ice skating, fishing, snowmobiling, soaking in the hot springs, shopping, sleeping, or satiating your appetite for food or drink — Pagosa Country offers choices that are sure to please you and everyone in your family or group.

Nestled at an elevation of 7,079 feet alongside the San Juan River, Pagosa Springs is surrounded on the east and north by the craggy spires of the Continental Divide, and the Weminuche and South San Juan wilderness areas. "The most snow in Colorado" falls upon the majestic San Juan Mountains and Wolf Creek Ski Area more frequently than any other mountain range in the state. Yet, it is here in Pagosa that uncommonly blue skies prevail more often than not.

Alpine skiing

Wolf Creek Ski Area, considered by many as one of the best-kept secrets in Colorado, offers skiers and snowboarders an abundance of powder and packed powder on sun-drenched slopes. Guests love it because the lift lines are short, the runs are long and the prices are lower than most areas in Colorado. You will also find more snow here than just about anywhere else in the state.

The ski area's calendar is jam-packed with activities designed for fun and families and all levels of expertise throughout the season. The area's school is renowned for its excellence, and there are plenty of fun programs for skiers and boarders of all ages.

Backcountry

Fans of snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, telemark and alpine touring often find themselves just plain giddy when they discover the beautiful, pristine backcountry areas available for their adventures. You can bring your own equipment, book a tour with an outfitter or rent whatever you need at a number of sporting goods shops in Pagosa.

Beginner and more-relaxed cross-country trails surround Pagosa Springs. For those seeking a "wilder" experience, there are cross-country trails in the vicinity of Wolf Creek Pass and in other parts of the San Juan National Forest. With plenty of trails and an abundance of snow, there are innumerable opportunities for the skilled and well-equipped backcountry adventurer.

Cross-country skiing

If alpine skiing isn't your forté, the Pagosa Nordic Club undertakes an ambitious program to bring a variety of groomed Nordic ski trails for classic cross-country and skate skiing opportunities in the Pagosa Springs area.

In town, the club grooms trails in Yamaguchi Park. Cloman Park and the West Fork trailhead located east of Pagosa Springs offer scenic views, as does Fall Creek on Wolf Creek Pass. The Pagosa Ranger District grooms Coyote Hill and Wolf Creek Ski Area

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grooms Alberta Park for more Nordic skiing opportunities. Other groomed and ungroomed trails can also be found in the area.

If you would like to improve your Nordic skiing skills, there are clinics held throughout the winter months and a number of family-oriented race events. For event and trail information, visit the club's website, PagosaNordic.com.

Ice fishing

If braving the cold to catch perch, trout or bass is your sport, then try ice fishing at one of the spots favored by locals, such as Williams Creek Reservoir or Echo Lake.

Numerous businesses and sporting goods stores sell fishing licenses and can give you the inside scoop on winter fishing.

Ice skating

During the height of winter, when a day on the slopes is, for whatever reason, out of the question, people trade in their boards for a pair of blades and head to the ponds.

Located at the eastern edge of town, just north of U.S. 160 next to the San Juan River and adjacent to the River Center shopping complex, ice skating is available to visitors and locals alike on the lower west-end pond at the River Center Park.

The pond is usually groomed for skaters from about mid-December until mid-February (depending on weather conditions).

Mineral hot springs

A long, relaxing soak in Pagosa Springs' world-famous healing waters is the perfect way to end a day of winter fun. Visitors and locals alike laud the waters' curative powers. Three mineral hot springs facilities are enjoyed by thousands of guests year-round.

Holiday festivities

If you happen to be in Pagosa Springs for the holidays, you're in for a treat. Merchants traditionally roll out the red shopping carpets to help you find the perfect gifts, and local governments, businesses and nonprofits work to make the holidays magical.

Christmas in Pagosa Springs is a special time of year, with holiday lights twinkling throughout town. Santa sightings occur throughout December around town and at Wolf Creek Ski Area. It's also a busy time of year for nonprofit organizations as they plan festive concerts, plays, markets and more.

The annual Festival of Trees, hosted by the Ross Aragon Community Center in early December, benefits numerous nonprofits in Pagosa Springs. Attendees can marvel in the beautifully and creatively decorated trees, enjoy the music and delicious food and get caught up in the bidding wars. It is a festive night made better by its benefiting community nonprofit agencies.

Old Fashioned Christmas, set for Dec. 20, has been likened to a Hallmark movie where the community and its visitors can stroll, celebrate Christmas, visit Santa, enjoy being together and take in the downtown area lit up for the season.

As the winter season progresses, the community welcomes visitors for WinterFest, which is set for Jan. 16-18.

WinterFest blows the blahs out of everyone with challenging sports, fun games, contests and antics and hot air balloon mass ascensions. It is a family-fun weekend where you can participate or spectate.

Weddings, reunions and more

From a simple, backyard affair to a lavish party for hundreds, Pagosa Springs and the surrounding area might be just what you're looking for to make your wedding or reunion something special.

Pagosa Country is a wonderful background for special events year-round (outdoor wedding ceremonies are fairly common even in winter and the variety of winter recreation opportunities can make for a story-worthy reunion), featuring the majestic Pagosa Peak, surrounding mountains and landscapes, good chances of clear blue skies, colorful and dramatic sunsets, and more. Or, if you're more of the indoor type, a number of venues can be rented for special events and decorated to fit your style.

In addition to Mother Nature providing her decorating expertise free of charge for your event, Pagosa Springs offers the amenities to help put together all the details for your picture-perfect event.

Photographers, florists, caterers and more, all complete with Pagosa flair, are at the ready. The area also offers a variety of unique lodging options for every budget and desire. Area rental businesses can help outfit your events for sound and seating.

Pagosa Country also provides experiences. It won't be a problem keeping family and friends entertained. A plethora of memorable indoor and outdoor activities cater to every age, skill level and area of interest — shopping, skiing, boarding, skating and more — all of which can be topped off with a soak in the area's mineral pools or a relaxing massage and an evening out taking in live music, live theater, a movie, comedian or other entertainment option.

And, if you're getting married with Archuleta County's majestic backdrops as your setting, make sure you're taking care of all of your bases, like your marriage license.

Marriage licenses can be obtained at the Archuleta County Clerk and Recorder's Office at 305 Village Drive. Call (970) 264-8350 to schedule marriage license appointments. An application for A marriage license and additional information is available at archuletacounty.gov.

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Rest & Relaxation

RANDI PIERCE

Each of Pagosa's bathing facilities offers its own unique take on the traditional soaking experience, and the savvy soaker does well to switch things up, experiencing how differently each place relaxes the spirit and heals the body.

While the mother spring's water remains at a natural temperature of 144 degrees and is far too hot for a relaxing soak, all the facilities cool the water for bathing and recreational purposes.

In planning how to split your time and experience Pagosa Country's healing waters, be sure to check the amenities and availability of each facility to help you take full advantage of what they have to offer.

Located on the main street of Pagosa Springs, the Overlook Hot Springs Spa offers soaking and massage services housed within old-world Victorian opulence. Offering indoor and outdoor pools, including a private tub room, massage and a steam room, the Overlook provides bathers an opportunity to soak while escaping the elements, or to take in the sights while soaking.

Those sights are best soaked in from the pools located on the building's roof, which give the Overlook its name and notoriety. With a panoramic view of historic downtown and beyond, the pools are a favorite with locals and visitors alike. There's also a sauna and geothermal tub. Also outside, the Overlook's courtyard features individual tubs, as well as a Jacuzzi. Inside, there are open pools, including a cold plunge, and a private pool room that can be rented by the hour by bathers who prefer to soak in a more intimate setting.

Just around the corner on the east side of Hot Springs Boulevard is the Healing Waters Resort and Spa, offering a large outdoor swimming pool, both indoor and outdoor tubs, hotel rooms, suites, cabins, and pull-through RV spaces with full hookups. The ambiance here is down home, western and friendly. Through long years of service, the hosts have learned to satisfy the needs of the most discriminating guest.

The resort offers 100 percent mineral water in its hot springs amenities, which include separate men's and women's indoor baths.

Across the street, The Springs Resort and Spa, home to the mother spring, focuses on relaxation and wellness, offering luxury hotel rooms, food and drink establishments, a full-service spa, more than 50 pools (the most in Colorado), cold river plunges, a waterfall and a steam grotto on the banks of the San Juan River.

A variety of therapeutic pools have temperatures ranging from 35 to 112 degrees, with waterfalls, mineral formations and other unique features. There is also a swimming pool of geothermal water with a temperature in the high 80s to low 90s.

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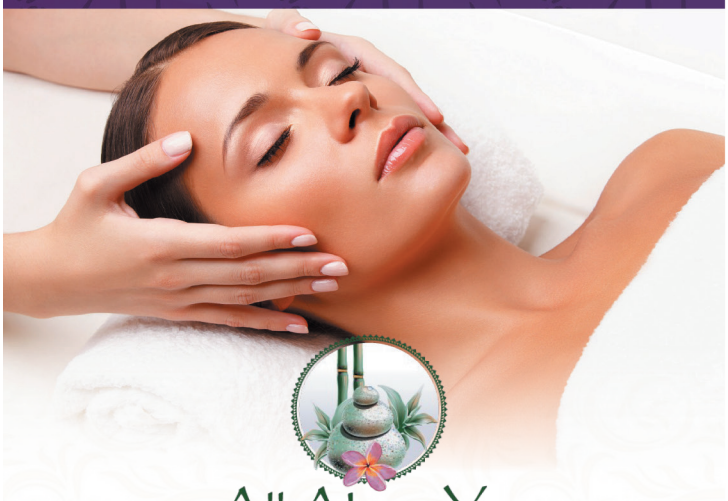

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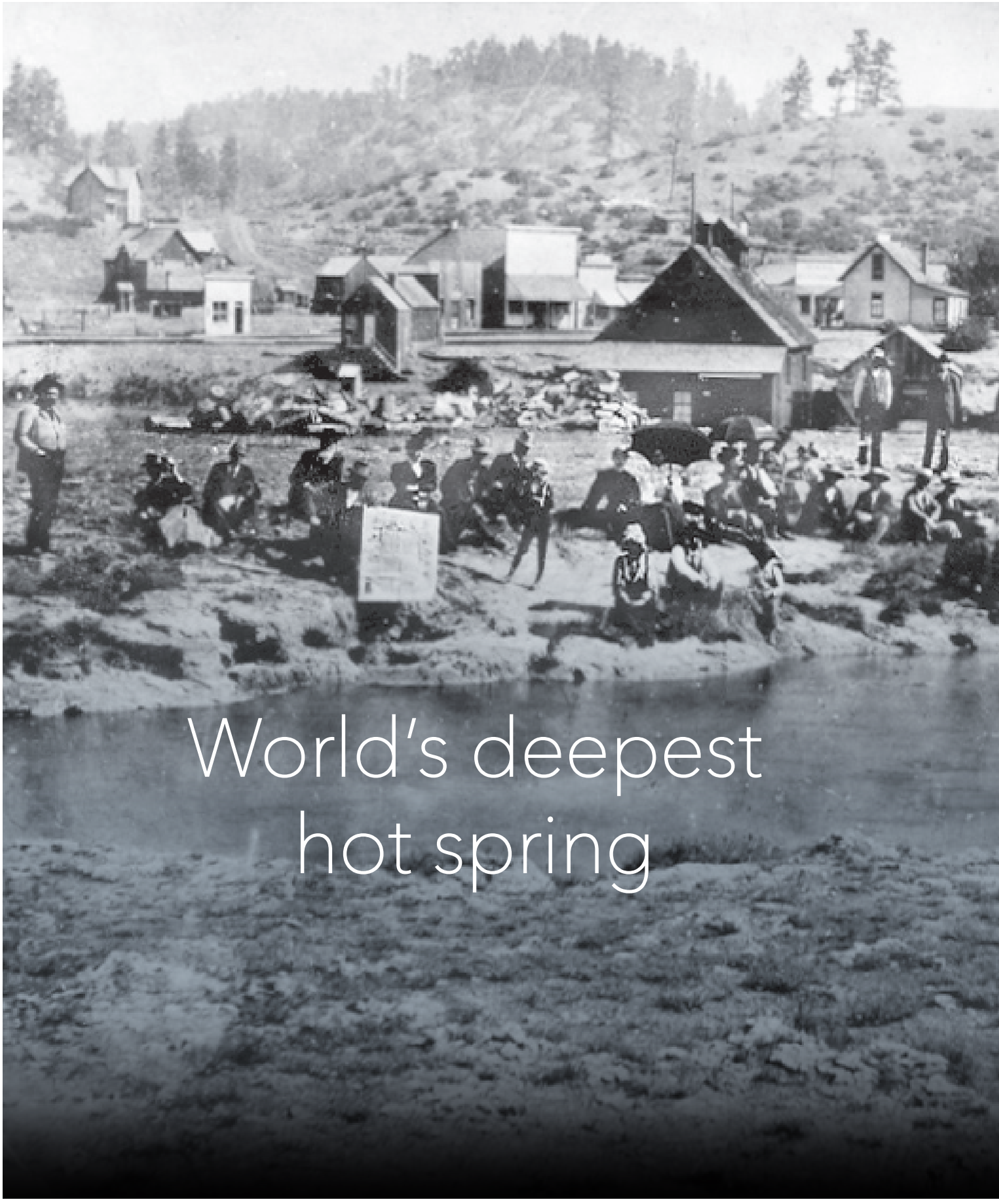

World's deepest hot spring

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Come on in, the water's fine

For centuries, the waters in Pagosa Springs have drawn visitors wishing to take advantage of the healing qualities of the world's deepest natural hot spring.

Prior to the arrival of Hispanic and Anglo settlers, members of various tribes of Native Americans came to heal and refresh themselves in the local waters. Historians report that Native Americans would coat themselves with mud mixed with the mineral water rather than soaking directly in the pools. The rationale was simple: at 144 degrees Fahrenheit, undiluted spring water is far too hot for a pleasurable soak.

Although early Hispanic and Anglo settlers took advantage of the hot springs from time to time, the healing properties of the waters largely remained a local secret. Eventually, however, word was passed regarding the "magical properties" of The Great Pagosa Hot Spring, and travelers sought out the medicinal qualities of the water. Since then, visitors from all over the world come to seek out a healing experience that was once known only to the local inhabitants.

Today, few of life's pleasures compete with surrendering your body to hot, soothing waters after a day on the slopes, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing the backcountry, skating or sledding the numerous hills in Pagosa Country. Locals call this luxury "ski and soak," a combination guaranteed to ease the aches and pains of even the most tired muscles.

Experience the 'magic'

Time and again, visitors here comment on the friendliness and laid-back demeanor of our residents. More than that, many visitors ask why so many of our locals seem so healthy and vibrant — an observation that inevitably leads to the question, "So, what's in the water?"

Local spin has it that the Ute term, "Pagosa," describes the mystical qualities of the legendary Great Pagosa Hot Spring, repeating the apocryphal tale that the phrase translates as "Healing Waters."

Alas, the truth might be much more hackneyed, but no less descriptive: local historian John Motter writes that, "According to the dictionary prepared under the auspices of and with the help of Southern Utes in Ignacio, Pagosa comes from two Ute words meaning 'stinking water.'"

Certainly, there is an unmistakable aroma accompanying the springs, but are they really also healing waters? You can judge for yourself, but abundant testimonials say, "yes."

And while Native Americans visited the geothermally heated waters, certain the Great Spirit endowed the bubbling cauldron with superhuman virtues, reverence for the "Healing Waters" has not abated with passage of time. In recent years, the Great Pagosa Hot Spring has attracted more visitors than ever before. And why not? It is a unique experience providing unmatched comfort and relaxation.

Making it all possible is the Great Pagosa Hot Spring, that bubbling fountain of natural mineral water and the world's deepest hot spring.

How can we make the claim of "the world's deepest hot spring?" Because the Guinness Book of World Records says so. A judge from the New York office of the Guinness Book of World Records visited Pagosa Springs to verify measurements on the Great Pagosa Hot Spring made by Durango-based hydrologist John Casey.

How deep is it? We wish we could say. So far, attempts to plumb the depths of the spring have defied the best efforts to find out. When Casey dropped a 1,002-foot long plumb line into the "mother spring," it didn't hit the bottom; instead, the plumb line ran out. So now, the official measurement is 1,002 feet and, according to the Guinness Book of World Records, that's the deepest hot spring in the world. Prior to that, however, the depth of the spring had been measured using a 2,500-foot plumb line. The same thing happened: Before the plumb line reached the bottom of the spring, the line ran out.

So, the mystery remains unsolved. Deeper still, however, is the mystery of our water's ability to soothe, heal and relax even the most harried soul. Visit the site of the spring and experience it for yourself. Take the opportunity to avail yourself of Pagosa's healing waters, its mystery, its spirit-rejuvenating properties and, yes — it's magic.

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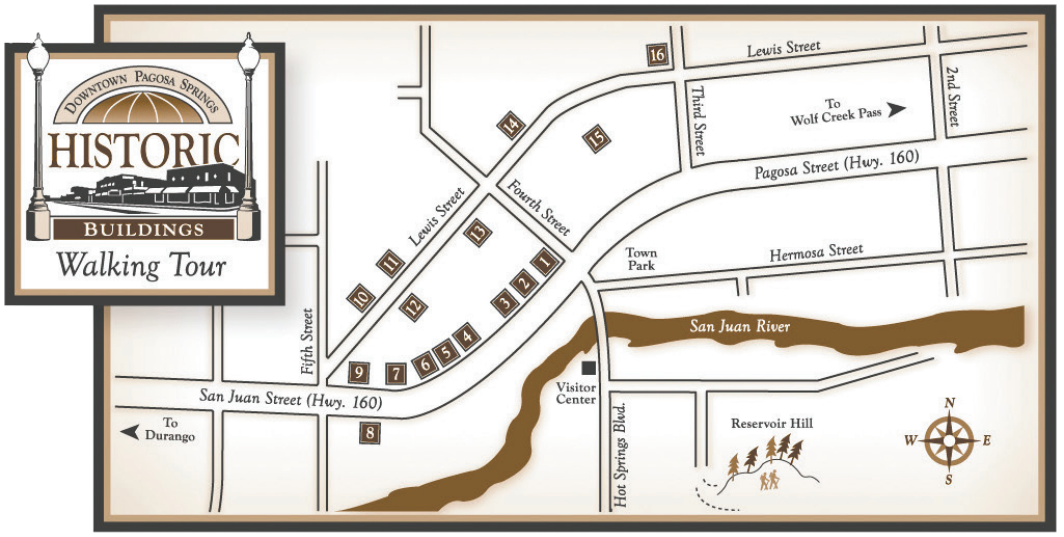
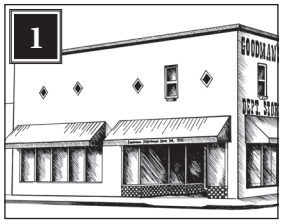


ILLUSTRATIONS AND TOUR COURTESY TOWN OF PAGOSA SPRINGS

Downtown Historic Walking Tour

1. 402 Pagosa Street
Goodman's Department Store



Following the departure of soldiers from Fort Lewis in 1880, pioneer David Lowenstein opened a clothing store at this location, conducting some of his business with Jicarilla Apache Indians. Through marriage, the Goodman family became associated with the business and eventually remodeled the structure in 1929. In 2000, Goodman's Department Store celebrated its 100th year in the building, continuing its legacy as the longest-operating department store in Pagosa Springs.

2. 418 and 422 Pagosa Street
Metropolitan Hotel and Liberty Theatre

Pagosa Lumber Company founder A.T. Sullenberger purchased the two-story brick building at this location in 1918, which was previously occupied by Archuleta Mercantile and built by J.M. Archuleta Jr. in the early 1900s. After a fire destroyed the structure in 1919, Sullenberger constructed the Metropolitan Hotel, which featured modern rooms, hot baths for guests and a motion-picture theatre.

3. 426 Pagosa Street
Sparks Hardware

Constructed in 1919, this structure was originally occupied by Sparks Hardware. Archuleta Motors opened a garage in the building several decades later. After fire damaged the building in 1943, Ben Lynch Sr. moved Jackisch Drug to this location, where it was operated by the Lynch family until 2004.

4. 452 Pagosa Street
The Hersch Building

Built by Alice Phillips in 1898 and owned by the Hatcher Brothers from 1905 to 1921, this building was purchased in 1921 and became Hersch Mercantile. The building operated as Hersch Mercantile until the 1970s and has held numerous social and business functions, as well as the law offices of former Colorado Attorney General Alonzo Hubbard.

5. 456 Pagosa Street
La Cantina

Clock Dry Goods Company operated at this location beginning in 1903. The building was briefly known as the Colorado Tavern from 1937 to 1941. The building was purchased in 1941 and renamed La Cantina by the L.M. Archuleta family. The Archuleta family operated La Cantina into the late 1990s until the building was purchased; renovations followed shortly thereafter, in 2001.

6. 468 Pagosa Street
Hatcher Hardware

Beginning in 1905, Hatcher Hardware operated at this location for several decades. In 1943, a fire almost completely destroyed the building. The existing building was constructed after the fire. At the rear of the property is the town's second geothermal well, which was drilled in 1920. The wellhead has the ability to pump approximately 675 gallons per minute and was previously used to heat the building.

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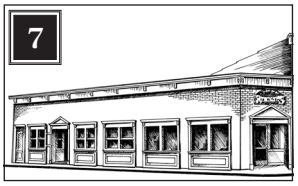
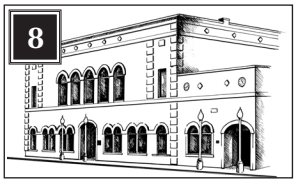
7. 474 Pagosa Street
Citizens Bank



Citizens Bank operated at this corner location for more than 70 years. Fred Catchpole opened the bank following the closure of First National Bank in 1908. The original building, constructed in 1910, was a two-story structure. The structure was remodeled into a one-story building after a fire damaged the second floor in 1943. Catchpole served as county commissioner and county treasurer and was also influential in the construction of the Wolf Creek Pass road. The original bank vault and Wells Fargo safe still remain inside.

8. 449 San Juan Street
Archuleta County Courthouse

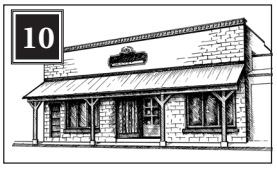


In 1927, Jay Catchpole approached the Archuleta County Commission and suggested the county purchase the old First National Bank building, along with the adjoining lot to construct a courthouse. The property was purchased for $5,000 and in 1929, the county moved into its new offices. The original bank vault still exists within the courthouse.

9. 480 San Juan Street
Moorehead Garage

This building originally functioned as a service station and auto garage and was constructed sometime between 1935 and 1937. A fire in 1943 destroyed a large portion of the structure. Numerous renovations have been completed since the fire, including significant restoration in 2005.

10. 468 Lewis Street
San Juan Supply

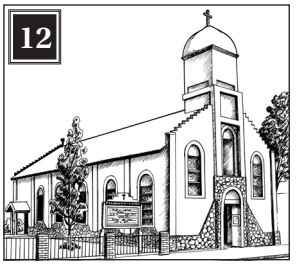


Ralph Morgan constructed this building in 1918 and opened the Electric Garage. The property was purchased by C.O. Dunagan in 1925 and later sold to the Schoonover family. In the 1930s, Paul and Virginia Decker became partners with the Schoonover family and operated San Juan Supply into the mid 1980s. The building has served a variety of commercial enterprises since the closure of San Juan Supply.

11. 444 Lewis Street
Sparks Residence

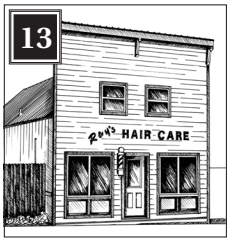
This ornamental concrete block building was constructed by Ethel Sparks in 1910. The home was purchased by Bryce and Julia Patterson in 1912. The Pattersons moved to town in 1904 and operated the Arlington Hotel and Bath House, which was across the street from the residence, until 1936.

12. 451 Lewis Street
Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church



This building was constructed in 1948 to accommodate an increased congregation at the existing Saint Edwards Catholic Church. The church was dedicated as the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church on May 22, 1949. The original stained glass windows were imported from Spain. Saint Edwards Catholic Church was destroyed by fire in the 1950s.

13. 409 Lewis Street
Ray's Hair Care



Located where the old Fort Lewis military paymaster's office may have stood, this building was constructed in 1902 by either Joseph Clarke or William Kester. The building has housed a number of businesses throughout the years, with Ray's Hair Care operating at this location from 1976 to early 2020.

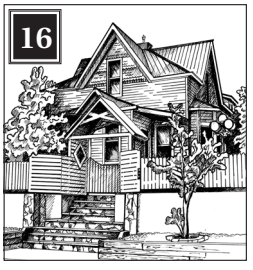
14. 380 Lewis Street
County Jail and Medical Office

County records show the jail may have been located on this property prior to 1936. The existing residence was built in the mid-1930s for a local medical doctor. The residence's architecture exemplifies the use of local stone materials.

15. 338 Pagosa Street
Pagosa Springs Middle School

Pagosa Springs' school was completely destroyed by fire in 1924. For a year, students attended school in churches, businesses and the Odd Fellows Lodge until this building, the new school, was finished in 1925. The building was constructed to be totally fireproof, with ramps instead of stairs, which was thought to be safer. The school originally housed all grade levels; however, today the school accommodates only fifth- and sixth-grade students.

16. 302 Lewis Street
Catchpole Residence



This residence was constructed as a Queen Anne-style home by Fred and Mabel Catchpole in 1910. From 1996 to 2002, the home experienced extensive remodeling, including siding, shingles, doors, windows and roof. The Catchpoles were active community members, with Fred serving terms as county commissioner and county treasurer, and Mabel serving terms on the school board and Methodist Church board.

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‘We just want people to get out and have fun’

Pagosa Nordic Club provides winter recreation opportunities

Winter may come with shorter days and cooler temperatures, but a plethora of outdoor recreation opportunities in Pagosa Country offered by local organizations like the Pagosa Nordic Club provide something to draw just about everyone outdoors to enjoy the snow and sunshine.

The club formed in 2008 when president and co-founder James Dickhoff helped band together a small group of community members to bring together resources to start setting cross-country ski tricks at trailheads and parks in the area.

Dickhoff explained the original mission of the club “was, really, to provide winter recreation opportunities.”

“There’s a lot of reasons to stay on the couch; we want to give a reason not to stay on the couch,” he said, acknowledging the challenges people might face in finding a hobby suitable for them and finding enough time to get outside.

The club puts on a number of events and free community clinics throughout the season, offering kids and adults the chance to learn a new sport or compete for bragging rights and even prizes.

“Typically, everyone walks away with something,” Dickhoff said.

The club puts on three free ski clinics with certified instructors throughout the season, two racing events and a moonlight ski social each winter season.

“All these events are family-friendly,” Dickhoff said, explaining there are multiple different categories for youth and adult racers to sign up for.

The two race events are the Red Ryder BB Gun Biathlon held at Yamaguchi Park during WinterFest and the Cabin Fever season opener for the Southwest Nordic Race Series.

The series features race events held in Durango; Telluride; Grand Mesa; Chama, N.M.; and Flagstaff, Ariz.

Dickhoff explained part of the motivation for him and others in the community to form the club was due to there not being many cross-country ski trails other than Alberta Park on Wolf Creek Pass at the time.

He explained that some locals would pack down trails at the West Fork trailhead, though actual grooming equipment

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PAGOSA NORDIC CLUB

wasn't used.

These days, the nonprofit club grooms and maintains about 60 kilometers worth of trails with tracks at the West Fork trailhead, the Fall Creek trailhead going up the pass, Cloman Park, Coyote Hill and a loop at Yamaguchi Park downtown when there is enough snow.

"They all have their own special attribute," Dickhoff said, noting how there are higher- and lower-elevation options, loop trails, in-and-out style trails, and beginner and advanced terrain to choose from with all of the available trails.

The club is 100 percent volunteer operated, and yearly fees are collected to cover equipment needs and fuel. Volunteers use snowmobiles and UTVs with snow tracks to pull a snow-grooming implement, allowing for two types of trails to be set, Dickhoff explained.

"And our purpose is to provide groomed ski trails for the community to use and get out in the winter time," he said, noting there is no charge for people to use the trails.

The equipment the club has, which community donations helped acquire, uses a comb to groom a corduroy track and a track setter for traditional cross-country skiing.

A yearly membership to join the club is $30 for an individual or $50 for a family.

"We just want people to get out and have fun," Dickhoff said, explaining the intention is to keep the membership fee affordable.

The club currently has around 450 members, Dickhoff explained, mentioning more than 16 local businesses have supported the club over the years.

Dickhoff expressed it's a "core group of volunteers" that make keeping up with grooming throughout the winter possible.

Over the years the club, alongside the San Juan Outdoor Club, has been able to purchase ski equipment to be donated for youth school programs, providing complete ski sets for kids to be able to use for free.

Dickhoff talked about the importance of introducing youth to self-propelled sports, encouraging physical activity and a sense of independence.

"We just want stuff for the kids to do," he said, "'cause that's the future of our sport."

After-school youth programs are available for kids from elementary to high school age, Dickhoff explained, noting the club stays active in purchasing equipment and gear to be able to provide more opportunities to kids in the community.

When asked about a favorite trail, Dickhoff mentioned that, for him, it's really about "just getting outside."

A winter season in Pagosa can allow for skiing as early as mid-October and go into the late spring with higher-elevation trail options like Fall Creek.

Other trails being close to town also offers more convenient and closer access for those looking to stay near town.

"They all have their own special attributes," Dickhoff said of the trail options available.

For more information on the Pagosa Nordic Club, visit pagosanordic.com.

SCOTT DW SMITH/WOLF CREEK SKI AREA

Wolf Creek Ski Area

Wolf Creek Ski Area, now in its 86th year, is not only known for having "The Most Snow in Colorado," but for also being family-owned and operated for nearly five decades, and for sustainable business practices such as using renewable energy year-round for decades.

The 2021-2022 season was a success after Wolf Creek was the first in the nation to open for the ski season, and had a number of prolific powder days, exceptional conditions and 385 inches of snowfall. The 2022-2023 season followed suit, logging ample days with favorable conditions and nearly 500 inches of snowfall over the season. Annual snowfall is estimated at 430 inches. The success has continued, with Wolf Creek kicking off it's 85th year by being the first ski area in North America to open for the 2024-2025 season.

Wolf Creek, offering 1,600 skiable acres perched atop the Continental Divide, is known for having an exceptional variety of terrain, abundant snowfall and plenty of powder days. It has terrain that ranges from gradual sloping, wide green runs for beginners to excellent expert terrain that will give advanced skiers and boarders an in-bounds backcountry experience. Finding an intermediate groomer to cruise down is easy, and tree skiing is endless.

Beginner trails make up 20 percent of the mountain's trails, intermediate 35 percent and expert 20 percent. The ski area features 133 named trails, with 42 miles of trails and 11 lifts.

Wolf Creek is also unique in that the location of the ski area is in the beautiful Southern San Juan Mountains, eliminating the frustration of driving on a heavily trafficked corridor to ski. The ski area has the advantage of being located on U.S. 160 near the summit of Wolf Creek Pass, which is a beautiful and well-maintained mountain pass with three and four lanes of highway.

It also offers stunning views of the surrounding mountains, with a base elevation 10,300 feet and a summit elevation of 11,904 feet.

But those who operate the ski area are not content to just rely upon decades years of story-worthy winter sports and stunning views. Improvements are continually being made to the ski area to improve the experience.

In 2025, the ski area built a new snowboard rental shop. In 2023, Wolf Creek Ski Area announced the construction and installation of a new chairlift, The Tumbler, to Wolf Creek's refined lift system, giving the destination 11 lifts. The Tumbler chairlift seats four riders and is a fixed-grip lift that is 900 feet in length, which is equivalent in length to the Nova Lift. While the Nova Lift, a double chairlift, is for beginners, the lift is better-suited and more ideal for snowboarders and Wolf Pups. The Tumbler Lift provides an alternative for first-time adult skiers. By adding a third lift to the beginner lift ticket package, the Nova Lift and Lynx Learning Center see the more familiar, low-density skiing experience found around the rest of the mountain. The Tumbler Lift has enhanced the ski area's established reputation for being both family- and beginner-friendly.

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10 Old School Meeting Place

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SCOTT DW SMITH/WOLF CREEK SKI AREA

Other improvements made in recent years include extending snowmaking to the top of the Treasure Stoke quad chairlift.

To complement your day, the ski area also offers shopping and a number of places to eat.

Whether this is your first year at Wolf Creek or your 86th, you'll find no shortage of adventure and fun in the most snow in Colorado.

Additional information can be found on www.WolfCreekSki.com or by calling (970) 264-5639 or (800) SKI-WOLF.

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Snowmobiling

For some, making snow angels just doesn't cut it for winter fun. Nor does a downhill sled taken to any of the area's popular sledding destinations. Or soaking in the hot springs as the steam rises around you, immersing you in warmth.

Some need a little more adventure and adrenaline.

But not to worry, if you want to rev it up, snowmobiling might be the activity for you.

Pagosa Country offers plenty of opportunities for snowmobile adventures and travel. Thanks to the San Juan National Forest Pagosa Ranger District, among others, there is a wide selection of designated snowmobile routes. The routes follow unplowed forest roads and trails, many of which are groomed by a local volunteer group, the Wolf Creek Trailblazers Club, under authorization of the Forest Service.

Grooming frequencies vary due to conditions and resources, and most routes are only minimally marked, making route-finding skills, maps, avalanche awareness and good pre-trip planning essential for a safe expedition into the Pagosa backcountry during the winter months.

Trail descriptions have been developed to assist visitors in locating snowmobile opportunities in the Pagosa area. Mileages are approximate and do not represent round-trip distances from trailheads.

Please be familiar with the rules, regulations and tips for safe winter travel and be respectful of the other trail users such as bikers, skiers, walkers and snowshoers you'll see out on the groomed trails.

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Rules and regulations

• Cross-country winter travel is generally permitted in the Pagosa Ranger District. However, there are areas in which snowmobiles are prohibited or restricted to designated routes.

• Snowmobiles are prohibited in the Weminuche Wilderness, the South San Juan Wilderness and the Piedra Area.

• Please refer to the San Juan National Forest Visitor Map, reference the area table or visit https://trails.colorado.gov/ for information about the location of areas where travel is restricted to designated routes.

• Each over-the-snow vehicle that is operated on public land or trails in Colorado must be registered with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). Out-of-state residents who bring snowmobiles into Colorado must purchase a Colorado snowmobile permit. For more information, contact CPW at (303) 791-1920 or cpw.state.co.us/register-snowmobile.

• Per Colorado law, it is unlawful to operate a snowmobile on some plowed public roads, including plowed roads located on national forest lands. It is also unlawful to pursue, drive at or otherwise intentionally disturb or harass any wildlife. For more information, go to cpw.state.co.us/activities/off-highway-vehicles-and-snowmobiles.

Pre-plan and prepare

The Forest Service does not manage or post signs for all hazards. That said, always be prepared for and aware of:

• Changing weather conditions.

• The potential for altitude sickness and hypothermia.

• The need to find your own way or turn back if conditions become too difficult for your skills, ability or equipment.

Avalanche danger

• Carry essential equipment and know how to use it.

• Be familiar with accepted winter travel procedures and rescue techniques.

• Daily avalanche forecasts can be obtained online at avalanche.state.co.us or by calling (970) 247-8187.

• More educational information, including a listing of available training, can be obtained at www.avalanche.org.

Route finding

Before setting out on untracked snow, remember that some trails are minimally maintained or unmarked. Route-finding skills are necessary. Always carry maps, such as the San Juan National Forest map and current topographic maps. Avoid trespassing on private property adjacent to, or surrounded by, national forest lands.

On ungroomed trails, users will be relying upon their own route-finding skills, maps and, perhaps, the knowledge and skills of those who traveled before them.

Parking

Parking areas may not be plowed; therefore, parking space is often limited and may not be available after snowstorms when snow removal is in progress. Please park considerately without blocking gates or other vehicles.

Grooming conditions

There is not a set schedule for grooming and some trails may not be groomed for an entire season. For information about grooming conditions or to learn how you can help, go to www.snowmobilecolo.com.

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Image of Larry Fisher, founder of the Ski and Bow Rack

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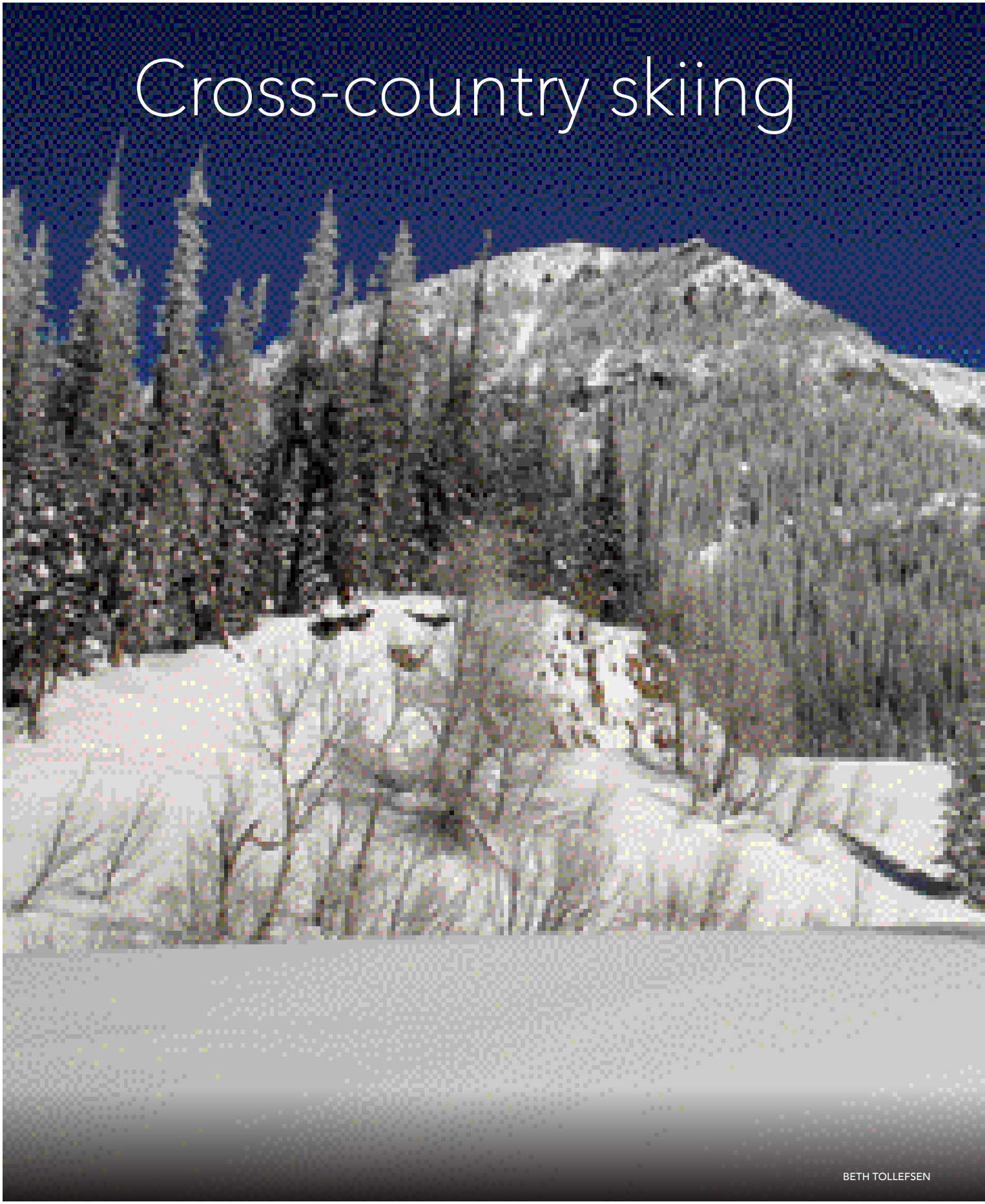
Cross-country skiing



BETH TOLLEFSEN

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Courtesy of the U.S. Forest Service and the Pagosa Nordic Club

The opportunities for snowshoeing, classic cross-country skiing and skate skiing in Pagosa Country are plentiful, no matter your level of experience. Some trails/areas cater to those attempting the sports for the first time, while others will challenge even the most experienced winter enthusiasts. The routes described are a mix of groomed trails and unplowed, ungroomed Forest Service roads closed to most vehicles except snowmobiles.

The U.S. Forest Service, Wolf Creek Trail Blazers Snowmobile Club, Wolf Creek Ski Area and Pagosa Nordic Club all work in conjunction to groom trails for the public to use for skate skiing, classic cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling.

The Forest Service roads listed are enjoyed and shared by people on skis, snowshoes and snowmobiles.

Check with the Pagosa Ranger District Office in downtown Pagosa Springs or go to PagosaNordic.com to learn more about groomed Nordic ski trail opportunities.

Parking

Parking may present a problem and at times may prevent the use of a particular route. Park considerately, taking no more space than needed to avoid blocking other vehicles or impeding access to trails, and without impeding access for emergency vehicles. Leave room for vehicles and trailers to turn around.

Colorado Department of Transportation crews clear parking areas along state highways adjacent to trail access, but their first priority is to clear the road. Avoid parking along highway travel lanes.

Trail etiquette

Cross-country skiers might find all types of winter recreation enthusiasts on trails in the Pagosa Springs area. Please don't ride fat bikes, walk or snowshoe on groomed Nordic ski trails. Yield the right of way to downhill traffic. Use caution when approaching or overtaking another user. Do not interfere with or harass other users. Do not disturb wildlife. Only friendly dogs under voice control are permitted, and all dog defecation should be removed from the ski trail. In addition, pack out everything you pack in.

Safety

Before venturing out onto unpacked snow, take the time to learn emergency procedures and backcountry travel and winter camping skills.

Weather and snow conditions can change rapidly in Colorado's mountains. Plan ahead and know what conditions to expect. Your trip will be much more enjoyable if you are physically and mentally prepared for whatever may arise.

Be prepared for medical emergencies and leave a detailed description of your trip plans with a responsible person each time you go. Make sure the person you leave your plan with knows to contact the sheriff's office if you fail to return.

In addition, consider purchasing a Colorado Outdoor Recreation Search and Rescue (CORSAR) card to ensure that the county can recover all of your search and rescue costs. Cards cost $5 for one year or $20 for five years and are available at hunting and fishing license vendors.

Weather

When planning any backcountry trek, check current and forecasted weather conditions before you leave home and continue to monitor the weather throughout your trip. Dramatic weather changes can occur in minutes throughout Pagosa Country, especially in the mountains. Be informed about avalanche terrain and conditions.

The Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC) provides current information on weather and avalanche conditions at http://avalanche.state.co.us, and weather and avalanche forecasts are available by calling (970) 247-8187.

Stay within limits

Recognize and stay within your limits. Carry the appropriate gear for your trip, including extra clothing, a space blanket, sunscreen, sunglasses or goggles, matches or lighter, extra food, and water. If traveling with a dog, carry plastic bags for cleaning up after your pooch. Carry a compass and topographical maps and know how to use them. For backcountry trips, avalanche safety skills and equipment, including a snow shovel, avalanche beacon and probe, are essential. In addition, be prepared to repair equipment and carry a simple field repair kit that includes supplies for common breakdowns.

Visit www.PagosaNordic.com or the Pagosa Ranger District office at 2nd Street and U.S. 160 in downtown Pagosa Springs for up-to-date trail status and conditions.

Recommended equipment

As a general rule, dress in layers so you can add and subtract layers as you become hot or cold. Remember, it can be quite cold in the morning, warm up considerably during the day, and get cold as soon as the sun moves behind the hills or a cloud.

Avoid cotton clothing, especially next to the skin. You can be sure that you will get wet from sweat, from falling down or from snow falling off trees. You may get cold if you stop for any amount of time.

The weather may change dramatically if a front is coming in or if it starts snowing. In a group, some items can be shared.

Equipment and clothing

Skis, boots, poles — no-wax skis, maxiglide or other for sticking; waxable skis — waxes, cork, scraper and snow thermometer; sunglasses or glacier glasses; sunscreen; day pack or fanny pack; Swiss army knife; compass; maps; quart-size canteen or wide-mouth bottle filled with water; long underwear (polypropylene or other synthetic); intermediate layer — sweater (wool or synthetic) or shirt (wool or synthetic); windbreaker layer (nylon, 60/40 cloth, avoid garments that are heavily treated with waterproofing); pants or knickers (wool or synthetic, blue jeans are not recommended); socks (wool or synthetic); liner socks; hat (wool or synthetic) — you must be able to cover your ears; high-energy snacks and lunch, if appropriate; toilet paper and plastic bag for used paper; first aid kit; flashlight; vest (down or synthetic) or warmer jacket (down or synthetic); poncho and/or space blanket; extra hats, extra gloves; balaclava or ski mask; neck gaiter; ear band (knit-wool or synthetic); thin polypropylene or other synthetic gloves to operate equipment such as cameras; matches in a waterproof container; candle; whistle; duct tape; ski tip.

Groomed Nordic skiing trails

Groomed Nordic ski trails are for classic cross-country skiing and skate skiing only. Other users, including walkers and snowshoers, should avoid groomed surfaces. Visit PagosaNordic.com for full trail details.

Alberta Lake Trails

Wolf Creek Ski Area grooms up to 10 km for skate skiing and classic cross-country skiing. A beautiful setting that starts at the end of the Alberta parking lot of Wolf Creek Ski Area and travels through the forest. Wolf Creek Ski Area has groomed this cross-country ski trail for many years, with no fees required.

Ability levels: Beginner 20 percent, intermediate 50 percent, advanced 30 percent.

Special features: The first 1 km is intermediate access to the Alberta Meadow Nordic trails. Beginners should be aware of the slope and that speed control is needed There is no ability-level signage.

Getting there: Travel 24 miles east on U.S. 160 to Wolf Creek Ski Area. The parking attendant can guide you to the far east end of the Alberta parking lot where the Alberta Park cross-country ski trail begins.

West Fork Trails

The Pagosa Nordic Club grooms up to 15 km for skate skiing, with set tracks for classic cross-country skiing. With an abundance of flat, groomed and natural terrain, the West Fork area provides fantastic cross-country opportunities for beginners and families, as well as experienced skiers.

Ability levels: Beginner 80 percent, intermediate 10 percent, advanced 10 percent.

Special features: The area offers skiers the chance to ski through stands of giant conifers, as well as scenic views of the valley floor and the headwaters of the San Juan River.

Getting there: Drive 14 miles east of Pagosa Springs on U.S. 160 — look for the Bruce Spruce Lodge sign on the left side of the road. Turn left onto West Fork Road (Forest Road 648). Drive to the end of the road (.25 miles). All-wheel drive vehicles are highly recommended to access the trailhead. Park on the side of the road where it is plowed.

Coyote Hill Trails

The Pagosa Nordic Club grooms up to 14 km for skate skiing, with set tracks for classic cross-country skiing. Excellent family and beginner area. The 14 km is groomed with three levels of cross-country skiing loops: The first level offers 3 km of beginner trails. The second level offers 3 km of intermediate terrain. The upper loop offers 6 km of intermediate and 2 km of advanced trails.

Ability levels: Beginner 20 percent, intermediate 70 percent, advanced 10 percent.

Special features: The trails are groomed exclusively for cross-country skiing. Walkers and snowshoers are asked to avoid the groomed trails. Snowmobiles are prohibited on Coyote Hill.

Getting there: Drive 6.3 miles north of U.S. 160 on Piedra Road (County Road 600). The trailhead is on the right, just after the cattle guard. Park in the pull-off if it is plowed.

Cloman Community Park Trails

The Pagosa Nordic Club grooms up to 15 km for skate skiing with set tracks for classic cross-country skiing. Excellent family and beginner area. Friendly dogs are welcome; however, some portions enter private property, where dogs are prohibited.

Ability levels: Beginner 40 percent, intermediate 40 percent, advanced 20 percent.

Special features: Close proximity to town and has recently been expanded. Please respect private property and stay on groomed trails. Good parking and toilet available.

Getting there: Drive 2 miles north on Piedra Road from U.S. 160, turn east on U.S. 160, then travel 2 miles to the trailhead (past the airport and sawmill).

Multiuse winter trails

Fourmile (winter) Trail

Follows Fourmile Road (CR 400, FR 645) from the winter closure point to its end.

Length: 4.6 miles.

Trailhead: Fourmile Road (CR 400) at winter closure.

Grooming: Occasionally groomed by the Wolf Creek Trailblazers snowmobile club, and can provide a quality distance ski.

Connections: Plumtaw Trail (FR 634).

Plumtaw Trail

The trail is accessed via the Fourmile (winter) Trail (FR 645). It follows Plumtaw Road (FR 634) to end at McManus Road (FR 633).

Length: 18.3 miles.

Trailheads: Fourmile Road (CR 400) or McManus Road (FR 633) at winter closure points.

Grooming: Occasionally groomed by the Wolf Creek Trailblazers snowmobile club, and can provide a quality distance ski.

Connections: The McManus-E. Toner Connector (5.8 miles) crosses the Middle Fork of the Piedra River. The route consists of a groomed trail to E. Toner Road (FR 637), then follows E. Toner Road to Middle Fork Road (FR 636) and continues southwest to a parking area at the junction with Piedra Road (FR 631).

East Fork Road (FR 667)

An enjoyable route for one or several miles, this route parallels the East Fork of the San Juan River. It is 8 miles to the historic Silver Falls Guard Station. Please stay on the road as it passes through private property. This area sees significant snowmobile use.

Getting there: Travel 9.5 miles east on U.S. 160, turn southeast on East Fork Road, then continue about 3/4 mile to the parking area at the end of the plowed road.

Turkey Springs Trail

Length: 8.5-mile loop.

Trailhead: Turkey Springs Trailhead on Piedra Road (FR 631).

Grooming: Occasionally groomed by the Wolf Creek Trailblazers snowmobile club, and can provide a quality distance ski.

Connections: Monument Trail (FR 630).

Fall Creek Nordic Trail

Beginning at about 9,600 feet in elevation, this popular 3.5-mile route climbs gradually following Fall Creek Road. Groomed early season by the Pagosa Nordic Club for skate skiing with set tracks for classing cross-country skiing.

Getting there: Travel 19 miles northeast on U.S. 160 to Fall Creek Road (FR 039). Once cleared, there is a parking area on the south side of the highway. Avoid parking along travel lanes. This trail and area have been experiencing increased snowmobile use. Check PagosaNordic.com for grooming status.

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Backcountry skiing and snowshoeing

Lobo Overlook

This route climbs generally uphill for 1.5 miles to the Lobo Overlook, the Continental Divide Trail (and the microwave tower). Skiers will be rewarded with breathtaking views at the top. Snowmobiles are allowed on the Forest Service road and provide a packed trail for the ascent.

Getting there: Travel 23.2 miles northeast on U.S. 160. Parking and the road to the overlook are north of the highway just past the Continental Divide.

Nipple Mountain Road (Forest Road 665)

In addition to traveling Nipple Mountain Road, there are a few other options in this area. The hardy person with a map and backcountry skills may identify lengthy or loop trips.

Getting there: From downtown, go east on U.S. 160 to the junction with U.S. 84. Travel 1/8 mile south on U.S. 84 and turn left on Mill Creek Road (County Road 302), drive approximately 5 miles to trailhead parking before the junction with Nipple Mountain Road (665).

Blanco River Road (Forest Road 656)

Blanco River Road is closed at the highway. The route generally parallels the river for 2.5 miles from the highway to the Blanco River campground.

Getting there: Travel 11 miles south on U.S. 84 to Blanco River Road. Parking is limited.

Kenney Flats Road (Forest Road 006)

This road through open, fairly level terrain is good for beginners and provides several possible routes.

Getting there: Travel 14 miles south on U.S. 84 to Kenney Flats Road. Parking is located on the east side of the highway.

Williams Creek area

This is an open, fairly flat area that is good for beginners. Enjoy spectacular views of mountains and large, open parks. The unplowed road continues past Williams Creek Reservoir to the Poison Park and Williams Creek trails.

Getting there: From downtown, travel 2 miles west on U.S. 160, turn north on Piedra Road. Travel 22 miles, and then turn right on Williams Creek Road, continue to reservoir.

Jackson Mountain Road (Forest Road 037)

This is a gradual, uphill, 4-mile route to the end of an unplowed road with additional opportunities to travel other roads in the area. Jackson Mountain is a popular area for snowmobiles.

Getting there: Travel 7.3 miles northeast on U.S. 160. Parking is on the left at Jackson Mountain Road.

Wolf Creek Road

(On Wolf Creek Pass — Forest Road 725)

There are three access points along approximately 3 miles of road with some fairly open, moderate terrain in this area. The views are spectacular. This area is popular for snowmobiling. Skiers typically use Lobo Overlook, 1/2 mile east of the Wolf Creek Pass summit, on the north side of the road.

Getting there: To trailhead: Travel 20 miles northeast on U.S. 160 to Wolf Creek Road. Parking is on the right.

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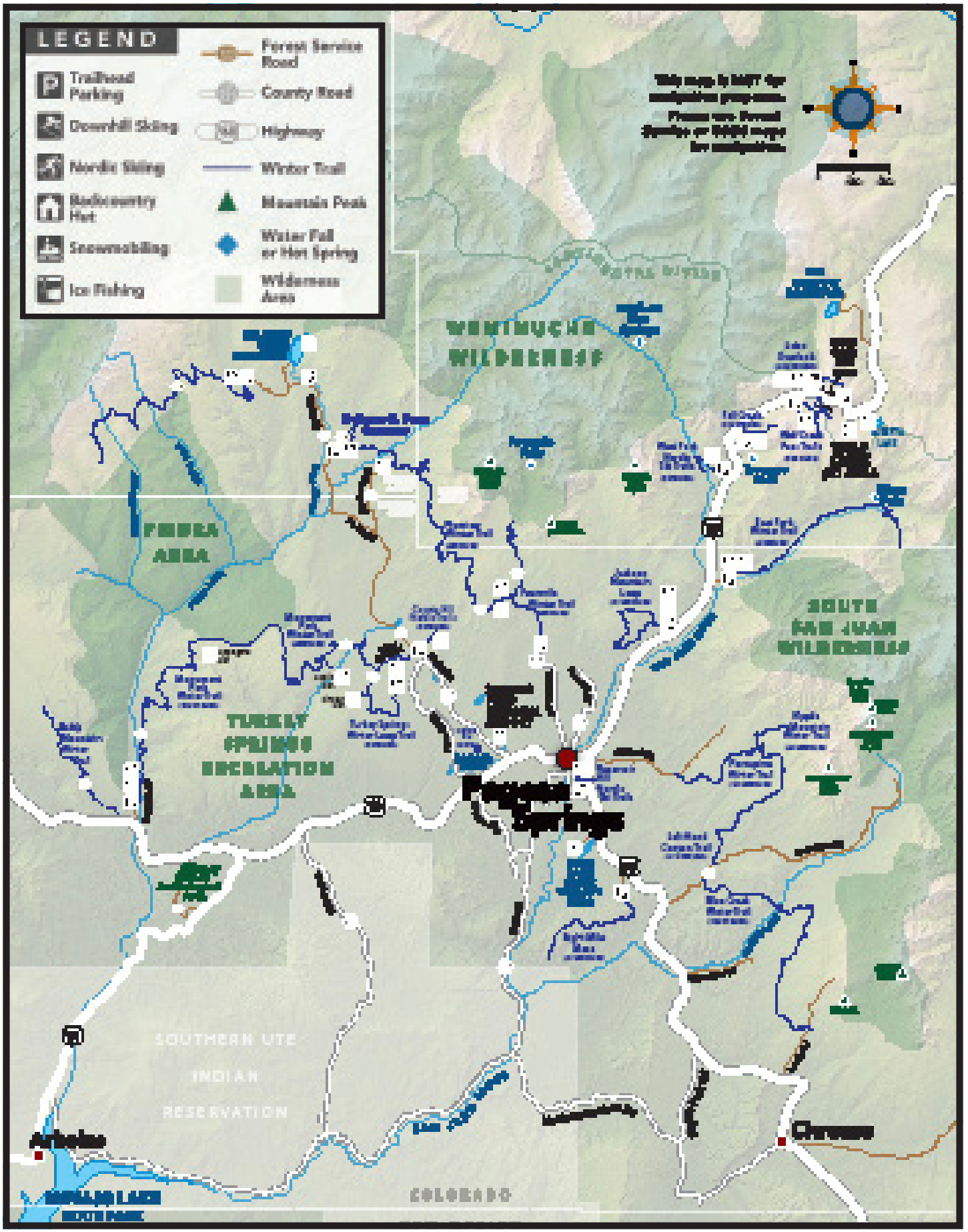

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Avalanche awareness

Twenty-two people were killed by avalanches in the U.S. in the winter of 2024-2025, including three in Colorado, according to the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC). Over the last 10 winters, an average of 27 people died in avalanches each winter in the United States.

While avalanches are a serious threat to winter backcountry travelers everywhere, they are particularly so here. In fact, according to the CAIC, Colorado has recorded more avalanche-related deaths since 1950 than any other state. Therefore, knowing how to recognize the elements that cause avalanches is essential for remaining safe while traveling in the mountains.

As a long spine of high inland peaks, the Colorado Rockies usually accumulate a colder, shallower snowpack than that of the mountain ranges nearer to the west coast. As a result, certain physical characteristics merge to create persistent fragile layers ripe for avalanche, once sufficient stress develops. The San Juan Mountains, for example, possess abundant steep terrain while receiving ample annual snowfall. As simple gravity increases stress, combined forces routinely elevate the risk of an avalanche.

A combination of weather, steep terrain and existing snowpack structure may give rise to avalanche danger. Weather factors typically include heavy snowfall, high winds and wildly fluctuating temperatures. Avalanche terrain is mainly determined by slope steepness and slope orientation to the wind and sun. Relevant snowpack characteristics include the formation and presence of weak layers vulnerable to increasing stress.

As stress on a slope overcomes the strength of its snowpack, an avalanche can result. Stress can increase dramatically under the weight of new snowfall, the sudden release of a cornice (or snow overhang), or, as an individual or group of skiers, snowboarders or snowmobilers moves across unstable snow. Most often, avalanche victims trigger the slides that overtake them or other members of their group.

Travelers should move singly in avalanche terrain to reduce stress on the snowpack while possessing the equipment and the skills necessary to successfully affect an avalanche rescue. Because a victim buried just 30 minutes stands less than a 35 percent chance of survival, time is of the essence. To aid in location and rescue efforts, each well-equipped party member should carry an electronic avalanche beacon, probe pole and lightweight shovel. In too many cases involving unintentional slides, ignorance, arrogance, fatigue or peer-group pressure can result in backcountry travelers ignoring obvious warning signs.

Backcountry travelers caught in an avalanche may not fare well. Whether being buried alive and deprived of oxygen for several minutes or being carried over cliffs, into trees, rocks or other large objects, serious injury — or worse — can result. Therefore, an immediate rescue is essential to increasing a victim's odds of survival. An individual's beacon helps companions locate him or her quickly, while a probe pole and shovel allow individuals to pinpoint and uncover companions buried in the snow. Backcountry enthusiasts can purchase this equipment from various recreational retailers in Pagosa Springs.

The CAIC provides daily mountain weather and avalanche hazard forecasts available at avalanche.state.co.us. Daily forecasts begin in early November and continue through most of May. Backcountry travelers should use this information as a basis for their own risk assessment and trip planning.

Educate yourself. Seek out knowledgeable people, read books, take an established avalanche course and — most important — always pay attention to the clues nature provides as you travel the backcountry.

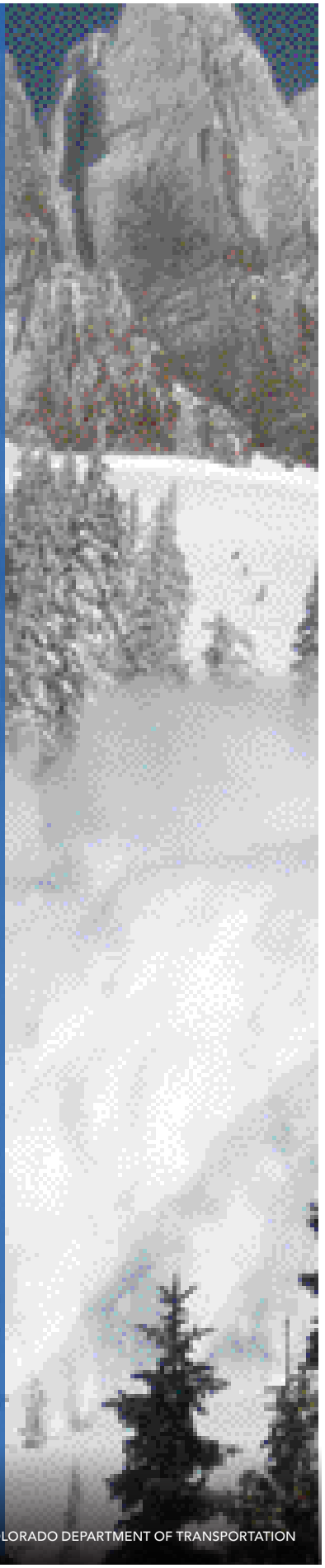
Recommended research

Avalanche Aware course is a free, self-paced course available at avalancheaware.com. The CAIC encourages all winter recreationists, regardless of their experience level, to take advantage of this resource.

Good books on avalanches are available at the library, or check information available online at avalanche.state.co.us and avalanche.org.

Also, watch The Pagosa Springs SUN and local outdoor shops for announcements about community avalanche awareness talks from experts who monitor and forecast local avalanches.

The CAIC is a program within the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Executive Director's Office, and is a partnership between the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Transportation and the Friends of the CAIC.



COURTESY COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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MICHAEL PIERCE

Why so much snow?

The locals aren't exaggerating— Pagosa Country really does have some of the best natural snow in Colorado, and the most of it.

If you don't believe the local lore, check the stats; nearly every winter, an average of 39 feet falls on the area's 12,000-foot alpine summits surrounding Wolf Creek Pass. One year, the total snowfall exceeded 75 feet.

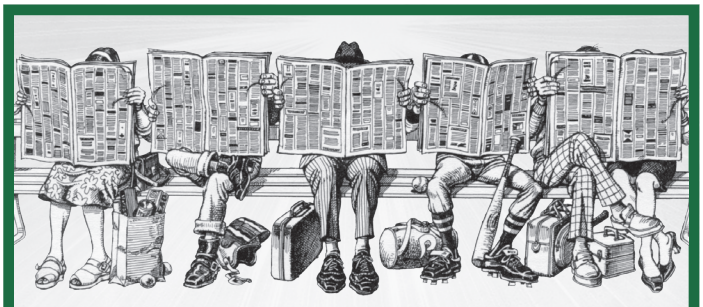
There's no question; this is the reason powder hounds love Wolf Creek Ski Area. No other Colorado ski mountain can predictably offer as much untracked powder and packed powder as Wolf Creek.

Meteorologists attribute Wolf Creek's consistent snow accumulation to the ski area's location within the San Juan Mountains and to numerous high peaks around Pagosa Springs.

According to weather experts, as relatively warm, subtropical moisture from the Pacific pushes east over the southwestern deserts and eventually rises up to surmount the southern San Juan Mountains, it cools and further condenses, thus creating additional moisture.

Because colder air holds less moisture, heavy winter precipitation falls in the form of light and powdery snow. The surrounding topography actually funnels this precipitation — referred to as "upslope weather" — to the ski area, thus producing some of the most and best snow anywhere in Colorado.

For winter sports enthusiasts, this means world-class skiing on the runs at Wolf Creek Ski Area, and outstanding cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling and more throughout Pagosa Country.



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BIRDING

American dipper
Cinclus mexicanus

An aquatic songbird of fast-flowing streams often found perched on a rock in the water, bobbing up and down. It dives into the water, and walks and swims along the bottom to forage for insects.

Yellow warbler
Setophaga petechia

A common summer resident in riparian trees and shrubs where males sing a sweet song. It is always on the move searching for insects along slender branches and leaves.

Belted kingfisher
Megaceryle alcyon

This bird patrols its territory near a river or lake, announcing its presence with a loud, rattling call. It watches from a perch or hovers over water before diving in headfirst to spear its prey.

Great blue heron
Ardea herodias

A tall, stately sentinel of aquatic shorelines. It stands motionless at the water's edge or wades slowly into shallow water while scanning for food before striking quickly at prey within range.

Bullock's oriole
Icterus bullockii

A bird with a sweet tooth attracted to juicy fruits, flower nectar and hummingbird feeders. Orange-colored males appear tropical. Less flashy females suspend woven nests from the tips of cottonwood branches.

Lewis's woodpecker
Melanerpes lewis

This colorful woodpecker watches from a high perch and sallies out like a flycatcher to snag aerial insects. Numbers are declining across their range, but they are still fairly common here.

Steller's jay
Cyanocitta stelleri

This crested western jay ascends a tree by hopping from branch to branch. Excellent mimic; can imitate cats, dogs, red-tailed hawks. It is quick to spy handouts at backyards, picnic tables and campgrounds.

Western tanager
Piranga ludoviciana

This bird arrives in May, bringing a splash of tropical color to open coniferous forests. Sings and forages in the upper layer of trees and shrubs, plucking insects from branches, twigs, leaves and flowers.

Black-headed grosbeak
Pheucticus melanocephalus

Both sexes fill summer forests with their long, sweet, loud songs and share duties of raising young. Its thick conical bill is used to crack seeds and crush hard-bodied insects and snails.

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Southwest Colorado is home to a wide variety of birds, with some calling the area home year-round, some calling the area home during the warmer months and some using it as a resting spot on their migrations. Birdwatching in Pagosa Springs is easy and can be done from anywhere. A few areas touted by Audubon for birding include the San Juan Riverwalk, Echo Canyon Reservoir, Lake Capote and Chimney Rock National Monument. Watch out for some of these birds, highlighted by local members of the Weminuche Audubon Society and Audubon Rockies.

PHOTOS: BYRON GRECO, CHARLES MARTINEZ, JEFFREY REICHEL

Western meadowlark

Sturnella neglecta

Often detected in open fields by its bright yellow breast with black V or fluty effervescent song that signals spring. It nests in open grassland depressions and benefits from thoughtful mowing practices.

Ruby-crowned kinglet

Corthylio calendula

A small, gray-green busy bird of the summer high country that often flicks its wings. It has white wing bars and partial white spectacles. It is more easily located by its exuberant song from the tops of trees than by sight.

Dusky grouse

Dendragapus obscurus

This bird spends much of its time foraging on the ground in chickenlike fashion. Females are a brown and white camouflage; males are slate blue/gray/brown with a yellow eyebrow.

Western grebe

Aechmophorus occidentalis

Elegant birds of large lakes, where their loud songs ring across the water. They disappear during long dives for fish. Choreographed courtship displays include pairs running together across the water's surface.

Ruddy duck

Oxyura jamaicensis

This small, compact, diving duck holds its long, stiff, tail straight up. The colorful summer male has sky-blue scoop-shaped bill, white cheeks and black cap. It often feeds at night and sleeps during the day.

Green-winged teal

Anas crecca

A small dabbling duck that feeds along shorelines, on wetland ponds and mudflats. Fine comb-like projections on the edge of bill allow it to filter invertebrates from water. In flight, deep green wing patches are visible.

Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

This large, vocal raptor plunges feet first into river or lake to grab a fish in its talons. It arrives in spring from Central or South America to build huge stick nests on snags or man-made platforms.

Bald eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

This bird of prey prefers fish, but will eat what's available. It makes large stick nests in trees close to water often reused year after year. Takes 3-4 years for juveniles to attain recognizable full adult plumage.

Song sparrow

Melospiza melodia

A resident of brushy habitats, often near water. Males sing from exposed perches. Makes short-distance flights to cover. Identified by a striped crown, long tail and coarse brown streaks on breast with central dark spot.

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From rugged to luxury, Pagosa Country has lodging to fit your style

No matter the type of relaxing vacation or adventure trip you're aiming to have in Pagosa Country, you'll find lodging suited to your style.

Pagosa Springs and the surrounding area feature everything from world-class lodging where celebrities have been known to stay to lodging opportunities where you'll only see other folks if and when you want to — and everything in between.

If you're looking for a traditional motel or hotel, you'll find several in Pagosa Springs, with many locally owned and operated by people who have called Pagosa Country home for years. That means that not only can they help you be rested and refreshed for your adventures, but can also give you tips about some of the best places to go.

If you're after lodging connected to our world-famous geothermal mineral waters and spa treatments, you'll find that, too, with different lodgers offering different ways to access and enjoy the waters and amenities to achieve true relaxation and rejuvenation.

Pagosa Springs also boasts a number of hotels and motels that have been renovated in recent years to provide modern, stylish accommodations near some of the town's most bustling and popular restaurants and lounges.

Too, a number of lodging establishments, ranging from hotels to motels and cabins to geodomes, can be found along the picturesque San Juan River and nearby the town's Riverwalk multiuse trail, shopping, restaurants, lounges, soaking facilities and more.

If you're looking for your own space, numerous cabins and private houses are available to rent, many complete with fireplaces and views of the snow-capped South San Juan Mountains.

Looking to get away from it all, be closer to the mountains and keep the adventure going? Huts and yurts surrounded by public lands that are open only to nonmotorized travel might be just what you're looking for.

Vacations in Pagosa Country are what you make of them, and the varied lodging available throughout the area can undoubtedly enhance it to make your trip even more memorable.

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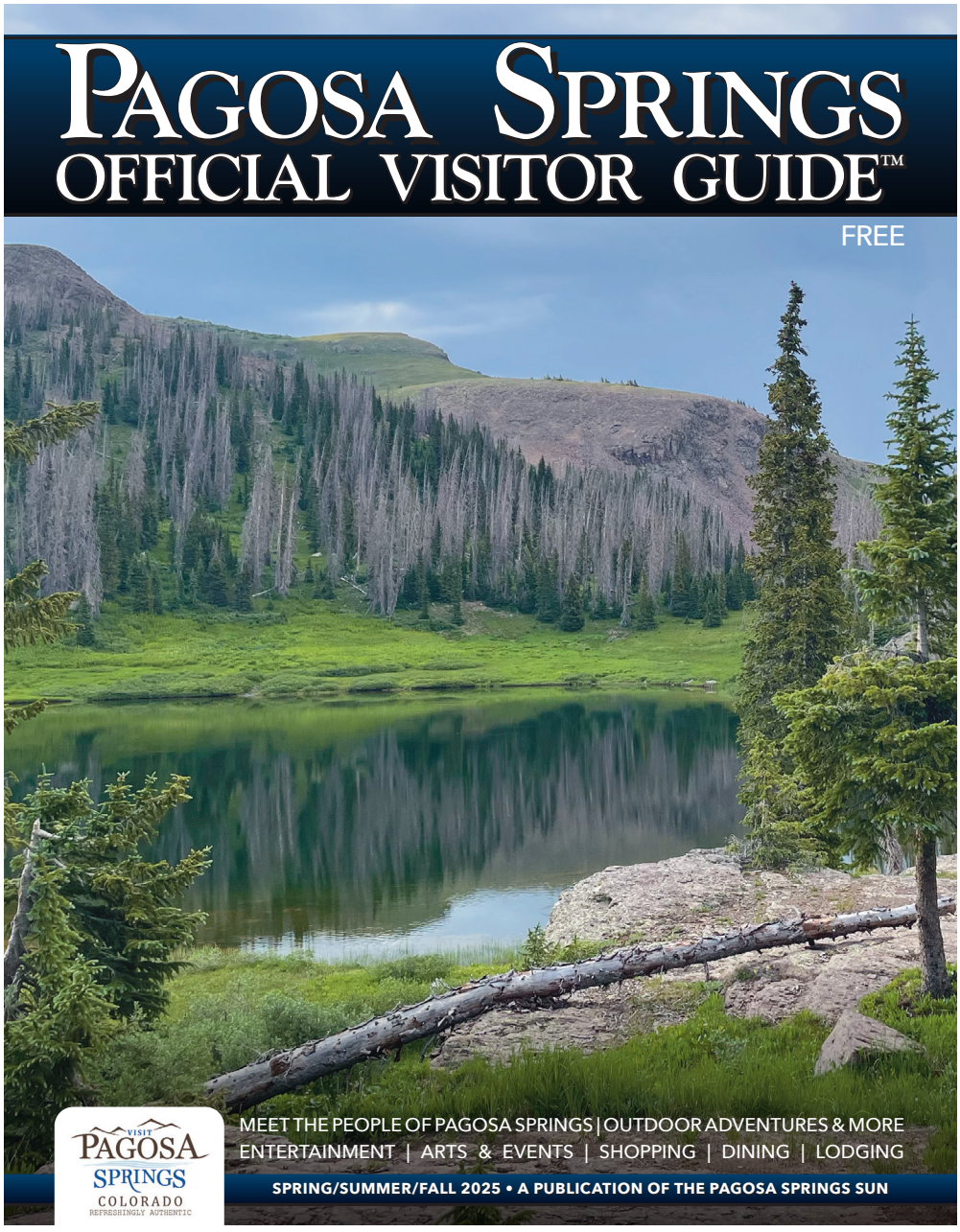

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Morning, noon or night, you can find a range of culinary delights

Pagosa Springs and Archuleta County have no shortage of talented people, and you can find a number of them showing off their artistry and talent in kitchens, offering locals and visitors alike scrumptious fare.

Whether you're fueling up for a day of fun, taking a mid-day rest to grab a bite to eat, or capping off a day spent exploring the area and what it has to offer, options abound to satisfy your cravings and keep you going during your adventure.

Pagosa boasts numerous restaurants that have made a name for themselves locally, as well as across the state and nation.

Riff Raff Brewing Company, for example, has earned a reputation and much acclaim as one of the best apres-ski spots to hit up. Pagosa's Meander Eatery, a farm-to-table restaurant, made the New York Times' prestigious restaurant list for 2024. The Alley House Grille has been named one of the top 10 percent of restaurants worldwide.

And that's just scratching the surface.

Ask locals their favorite restaurants and you're likely to hear a wide variety of answers — and suggestions that will keep you fed from morning until night.

They might suggest you start your day at one of our long-standing, popular coffee shops, bakeries, brunch spots or diners that they frequent, or suggest a new place that's making a splash.

For lunch or dinner you might be pointed toward a mouthwatering sandwich, burger, taco, fried chicken, salad or any number of other top-rated meals that might be in season.

You're also likely to be told the names of some of our food and beverage trucks that the locals line up for, or places perfect for grabbing a sweet treat in between your adventures.

Asking a local might also point you in the direction of some of the area's popular establishments that offer great live entertainment in addition to food and drink.

Or, they may suggest a quick bite and a trip to a can't-miss musical or theater performance or other live entertainment event.

That's because, in addition to being host to a number of delightful eating establishments, the Pagosa Springs area is home to many talented performers, ranging from youth just polishing their chops to Grammy winners and award-winning actors, making it easy to plan a night out featuring dinner and live entertainment.

Several venues around town work to regularly feature local musical talent, dancing, karaoke and more in the evenings.

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Or, you could be lucky enough to catch one of the Pagosa Springs Community Choir's annual Christmas concerts or another local organization holding a fundraiser or program that makes for a great night out with a live band or storied performer.

Perhaps you'll catch Tim Sullivan, an award-winning singer/songwriter who's played venues such as Carnegie Hall and with the likes of Vince Gill and Willie Nelson. Maybe you'll catch Bob Hemenger, a saxophonist and local teacher who has played with people like Victor Wooten, the Zac Brown Band and Darrell Scott, and has graced the stage of numerous festivals and even the famous Red Rocks Amphiteatre.

Or, you could catch any number of business owners, retirees and other locals who are counted among the area's favorites who will surprise you with their musical chops while you enjoy your fare.

But, let's face it — exploring can be tiring, and sometimes you just want a quiet night in even on vacation.

If you're looking to have a night in next to a cozy fire overlooking the South San Juan Mountains, or to host a special event or meal while you're here, Pagosa has a number of private chefs and caterers who can bring delectable dishes to you, or prepare the perfect cake or other dessert for your special occasion.

No matter what your goals are here in Pagosa Country, know the food you'll find won't let you down.

For more information on restaurant specials and live entertainment happening during your stay, pick up a copy of The Pagosa Springs SUN, visit www.PagosaSUN.com or www.visitpagosasprings.com, ask a local for their suggestions, or just pop into a restaurant or bar — who knows what you might find.

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Exploring the local character through shopping

Since long before it was incorporated as a town, Pagosa Springs, and the whole of Archuleta County, has experienced the booms and busts associated with numerous industries, including trading between Hispanics and Native American tribes, prospectors seeking gold, lumber mills and railroads. Over time, the flags of several nations have flown over the area, and multiple Native American tribes have called the region home.

But, through it all, Pagosa Springs stood firm, not falling to the same fate as many towns now listed as ghost towns.

Instead, Pagosa grew into a mountain town better known to many for its natural resources and wealth of public lands than its former industries.

Thanks to the varied history and natural beauty and resources in Pagosa Springs and Archuleta County, Pagosa — the county seat — now not only stands firm, but is packed with character, much of which is reflected in the goods you'll find for sale throughout town.

Shopping in the Pagosa Springs area can be a treat in and of itself.

From cabin decor to signs that embody your views on life, locally crafted wares, natural products of all sorts, on-trend apparel and quirky T-shirts, consignment finds, unique pajamas, western wear and goods that epitomize the western way of life, handmade jewelry with a southwestern flair, antiques, art, seasonal sporting goods, sweets and treats, you'll find it and more in Pagosa Springs.

And, where you find the goods might surprise you.

For example, you'll find coffee shops and what you might think is just a hardware store that carry things like trendy home goods, apparel, toys and more. A store offering clothes and locally crafted wares that, upon a closer look, also feature ax throwing? A sporting goods store that can outfit you for your adventures year-round and also features an indoor archery range that also offers lessons and rental equipment? Stores where you can also see those crafting the items? We have those too.

And that's part of the fun: heading into a shop not knowing what might be around the next corner. You never know what fun activity or what perfect gift you'll find for a loved one (or for yourself).

Even if you've been to a shop before, it's likely to be an adventure next time, too, since business owners like to keep things fresh and new. Or, in the case of antique stores, you may come across something you've never seen before or haven't seen in years.

And, in true small-town style, you won't often find the people working the stores simply waiting at the register for you to bring them money. Instead, they're often striking up conversations, finding that shirt in just the right size, or letting someone know

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that if they don't have what you want, where in town will or how they can get it for you.

In short, they're usually going above and beyond to make the shopping experience the best it can be for their customers.

That kind of service and attention is why you'll find numerous stores that are basically local landmarks, having been around for decades and run by local families for generations — some since the 1800s.

And, while you're walking in between shops, you can admire and explore parts of Pagosa's past. Among the pieces of the past readily available to see are the former hotel that now houses shops and offices and the historic movie theater — just check for signs around the buildings indicating their historical significance.

Shopping in Pagosa, like much of the area's history and current character, is about exploration — seeing what's around the next corner.

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ASPEN HOUSE/ASPEN SERVICES

Aspen House/Aspen Services: Creating a safe space for everyone

The mission of Aspen House/Aspen Services is to cultivate an environment of success for adults with developmental disabilities and their community.

The organization was founded in 2015 with the original name of "A Safe Place in Pagosa Inc., and that's what we wanted, a safe place for them to go home," co-founder Carolyn Paschal said.

She explained that she founded the nonprofit organization in 2015 with co-founder Pattie Brown with the goal of providing a home in the local community for their sons and other adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

"We just decided that we were going to figure this out," she said.

Paschal considered moving, even leaving for a couple years, as she became aware that the necessary services for her son were not available in the Pagosa Springs area at the time.

She explained that services were available in Durango, "but we wanted our kids to stay in the community" where they were born and raised.

"It's been a learning experience," Paschal said — noting everything involved in forming a nonprofit, from drafting bylaws, forming a board and putting on events was a learning experience — but "we're pretty proud of it."

In the beginning, "the focus was really to build Aspen House," Executive Director Pattie Copenhaver said, explaining the focus on providing the necessary services at the home and in the community became just as important.

Adding Aspen Services "was a huge step," Cophenhaver said, explaining that it provides a discovery program that is approved by the state.

"It's just a great program," she said, explaining that it places individuals in jobs in the community that suit their interest.

"It just feels so great to the families and to the individuals; they just feel so good about their accomplishments," she said.

The nonprofit runs PS Froyo — serving frozen yogurt, bagel sandwiches and more — which is run in part by adults in the community with I/DD.

"Now we're heading towards building the house," she said, explaining that a capital campaign — "Home Is Where The Heart Is" — has been launched to help raise funds for building the home and will also serve as an endowment fund intended to provide financial assistance to families.

A soft groundbreaking with utilities at the site of the future nine-bedroom home was held earlier in 2025, with plans for

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the home to be completed by fall 2027, though Paschal remains optimistic they will beat that date, indicating she sees "the potential of it happening sooner."

Copenhaver explained that more-standard shelter options can be more temporary, "so to be able to provide that stability for our community is really what we're looking for."

She added that "long-term stability for our community and families with loved ones who have disabilities" who need a home is their focus.

Copenhaver explained the home is being built uptown on Vista Boulevard and will have a Mountain Express Transit (the county's public transportation) bus stop, be located near walking trails, and be in close proximity other essential amenities like the hospital, grocery stores and recreation opportunities.

"We wanted to make sure they had the ability to do the things they wanted to do," she said.

She also explained the home will be a permanent home providing families peace of mind that their loved one will always have a safe place to go, and that "as soon as we get this house built, we're gonna be starting on the next one."

Copenhaver described Paschal and Brown as, "two determined mothers who were going to make it happen for their families" and who are watching their goals come to life while being an essential asset to other families in the community, as well.

"It's been quite the endeavor, but it's gonna be well worth it when we get it finished," Paschal said, explaining she credits Brown heavily with the idea of building the home, along with many other individuals and organizations in the community.

For more information about Aspen House/Aspen Services, visit www.aspenhousepagosa.org.

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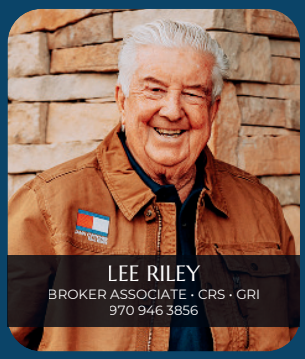

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Wildlife

MICHAEL PIERCE

If you've brought your camera and are inclined to trek through the extensive wilderness that composes the greater portion of Pagosa Country, be prepared for the chance to snap the shot of a lifetime.

In a region that ranges from 6,000 to 13,000 feet in elevation, the 1.8-million-acre San Juan National Forest not only hosts a complex diversity of climate zones, ecological niches and microenvironments, but also is home to a vast array of wildlife that call these diverse habitats home. As the country climbs in elevation from the south and east to the mountains north and west, that diversity becomes apparent as high-desert plateau gently transitions into alpine forest, then dramatically ascends beyond the tree line to alpine tundra. While many species of wildlife prefer to inhabit a specific ecological zone, others travel throughout Pagosa Country, seeking resources and habitat wherever they can find them.

Coyotes, foxes, cougars and black bears may roam the region at almost any elevation and are a common sight (and sometimes a nuisance) for residents and visitors alike. A special, but not uncommon, sight is the symbol of our country — the bald eagle — soaring majestically above meadows, lakes or rivers at all elevations. Snapping a photo of one of these birds perched atop a ponderosa pine is a rare treat.

In the lower reaches, short-horned lizards, eastern fence lizards, western rattlesnakes and ringtail cats share sandy sage flats, arid rocky slopes, deep canyons and sandstone mesas with jackrabbits, prairie dogs, elk and mule deer. Piñon jays, turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks and golden eagles commonly grace the sun-drenched skies above the high-desert plateau.

In the high country, observers may see bighorn sheep, snowshoe hares, ptarmigan or a rare Canada lynx. Although normally a denizen of high-country meadows, willow flats, forests and lakes north of Pagosa Springs, it is not unusual for the Shiras moose to be seen at most elevations. The largest member of the deer family, these creatures occasionally wander the streets and outskirts of town.

While the encroachment of civilization on some of the region's wilderness has decreased the numbers of several species in the area, many other species are thriving and even increasing in numbers, including foxes and coyotes, mule deer, bears, golden and bald eagles, wild turkeys and vultures. While mountain lions are normally solitary and secretive, reported sightings have become frequent, particularly between the hours of 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. Visitors and residents are cautioned not to feed local wildlife, especially as prey species can attract lions into residential areas. Food should never be left out to attract bears.

In the spring and early summer, infrequent hikers and wildlife watchers will invariably stumble upon a newborn fawn or elk calf. Baby birds, rabbits, foxes and squirrels may appear quite approachable, yet mother is almost certainly nearby. As long as a potential predator lurks about, she'll not return to feed or coddle her young. Therefore, it is always best to back away and leave little ones as they're found, and never touch or pick them up. They have not been abandoned. Survival in the wild is challenging enough without avoidable human interference.

In a bountiful area as rich and diverse as Pagosa Country, vigilant observers will enjoy an array of wildlife matched by few places on earth. The adventurous visitor traveling the canyons, mesas and forests early or late, moving in silence and employing a pair of good field glasses, is almost guaranteed to be rewarded with the sight of wildlife in their natural habitat — and the experience of a lifetime.

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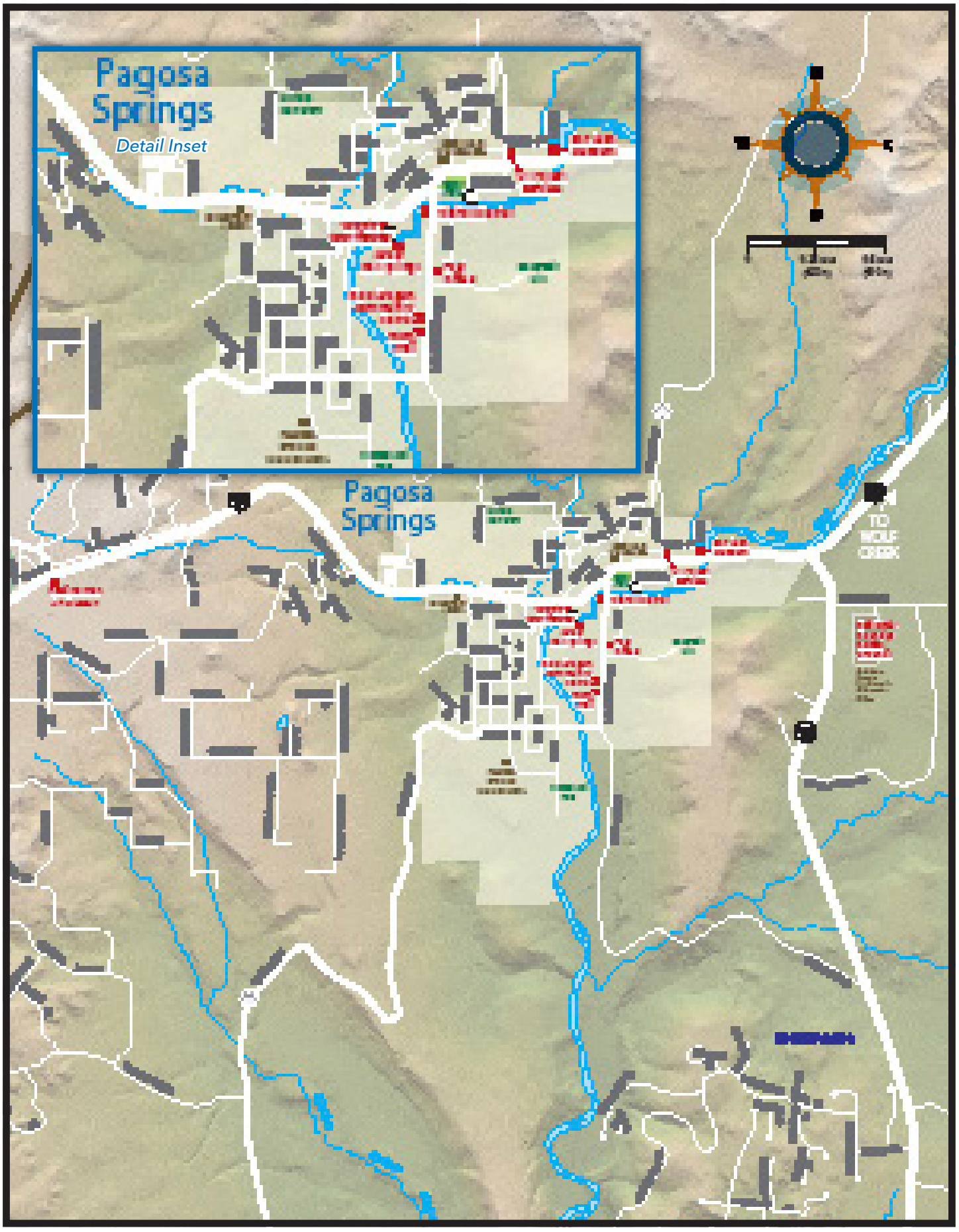

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RANDI PIERCE

Getting here

Stevens Field Airport

Archuleta County's Stevens Field, located just 3 miles west of downtown Pagosa Springs, is one of the most scenic airports around.

In addition to beauty, the airport boasts a fully lit asphalt runway that is 100 feet wide and 8,100 feet long. That runway has aircraft weight capacities of 70,000 pounds for dual-wheel gear and 59,000 pounds for single-wheel gear. Flight safety at the high-altitude, general aviation airport is reinforced with a Precision Approach Path Indicator system.

For more information on the airport, visit www.archuletacounty.org/45/Airport. For specific airport management questions or concerns, call the airport manager at (970) 731-3060.

The AWOS system is available on frequency 127.175 or by phone at (970) 731-0365.

Once you've landed, Pagosa Springs has car rental agencies and transportation companies to help you get around.

Fixed-Base Operator

For aviation services or to visit Blackhawk Aviation, the fixed-base operator, travel 3 miles west of town, then approximately 1 mile northwest on Piedra Road (CR 600). Turn right (northeast) on Cloman Boulevard and proceed to 61 Aviation Court.

The FBO offers a number of amenities, including aviation fuel and aircraft oxygen services, power cart, aircraft towing up to 88,000 pounds, rental car and crew cars, private hangars, tie down aircraft parking, catering and concierge services, secure auto parking, office space and more.

For more information about these and other airport services, call Blackhawk Aviation at (970) 731-2127 or visit blackhawkaviation.net.

La Plata County Airport

The Durango-La Plata County Airport offers daily service with American Airlines and United Airlines. The airport offers a full range of services within the terminal to make your visit comfortable. The airport has short- and long-term parking, full rental car services and shuttle/taxis.

The airport is located 60 miles from Pagosa Springs at the intersection of Airport Road and County Road 309A, approximately 1 mile from County Road 309.

For more information about flights and ancillary services, visit www.flydurango.com.

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"Hands down" THE BEST PLACE for RELAXING!! :)
Ariana Tafoya

OMG! This place STINKS BUT its Not your fault! I Love this place and wish I can come here every day! The staff was capital-AMAZING! Thank ya'll so much and definately see ya'll soon!
Kat + Shane
Austin TX! 2010

Teena is an absolute blessing! Magic hands, beautiful conversationalist, and she went above and beyond, make our entire day fantastic! We will be giving y fantastic TripAdvisor rating and ill be back!
Thanks again!
Dustin & Tara Weldy
Lewisburg, OH

Scott & Katie Parker
Dallas, TX

This is our first time at this place & can't believe it took so long! so excited!!

Absolutely LOVED every aspect about this lovely place.
Austin, TX Ari, Monica, Alexa

Love love love Overlook Hot Springs! Will definitely be back!
Paul & Sue
Phoenix, AZ :)

What a relaxing and tranquil place! MUCH better than your friends across the road! Great service and very clean. We will recommend you to MANY!
Brooke & Trent
Reveg Cari

I am a man of many words.... Perfect.
Andrea + Garrett

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4.5 RATING!

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