

What if you didn't get a permit

Paddlers, consider searching for cancelled and non-lottery permits. You would still first include the others in the Club who applied--the basic rule of permit parties. Here's how:

Getting a river permit without a lottery draw

So, you failed to draw a river permit through the lotteries. But you can still get a permit. Permits may become available because they weren't paid for, or they were cancelled, or they are for dates and days outside of the lottery dates. For example, the Chama Lottery was for Friday/Saturday permits. How about putting in on a weekday?

It's always good to check the average flow rates to see if the river is likely to be too high or too low for your wishes and abilities. For example, you might want to float the Yampa through Dinosaur and you look at a date after July 10. Flows may be 300 to 1500 cfs. For rafts you hope for at least 800 cfs, and for canoes at least 500, or for canoes with some riffle-dragging, down to 350.

All the permitted rivers of interest in our Permit Party are accessible through Recreation.gov – except for the Smith, which is accessible through Montana Game and Fish/State Parks.

Rec.gov has a date for each river on which the cancelled and unfilled reservations come available. Also available are the low-season, non-lottery dates. For the Chama the weekday launches become available as well.

So, check Recreation.gov on the posting date, beginning 8 a.m. MDT. The more people on the “wanna go” list who check for openings the better. Some rivers, like the Green/Yampa in Dinosaur might require that you did apply for the regular lottery draw in order to get cancelled permits.

Good strategy: Let's say 12 people were unsuccessful applicants for “Dream River.” So those 12 agree to keep checking, daily, as early as a cancelled permit becomes available. Person A does so for a week. Then Person B for the next week, etc., looking for times the group can go.

Here are the dates you can begin checking (but check after that, too):

CHAMA RIVER – April 1. When do you want to go? Late April/early May- can be cold, snowy, rainy but usually nice: temps: 70 day, 30's nights. April 1 at 8 a.m: go on Rec.gov and check for availability and grab.

SAN JUAN RIVER – March 16

YAMPA and GREEN IN DINOSAUR – March 6. The low-water Yampa trip still requires class 3 paddlers! Same with the Green. Also phone the call center at 1-877-444-6777. I recommend calling them: They may know some dates not yet shown on Rec.gov.

GRAY'S AND DESOLATION CANYONS - Check Rec.Gov March 15 and beyond.

IDAHO 4-RIVERS (MAIN AND MIDDLE FORK SALMON (Hell's Canyon on the Snake, Main Salmon, Middle Fork Salmon, Selway - Check Rec.gov 8 a.m. March 16 and beyond.

SMITH RIVER MONTANA - Only idea open now is to buy "super-permit" lottery tickets, \$5 each, through April 1, with the result to be announced April 2. You can buy as many as you want (great scheme for Montana's bank account!). Probably 100's of these purchased, all for one permit, but...Still waiting to hear how one might search for/pounce on a cancelled Smith permit.

Some rivers will let you choose pre-season or post-season dates as early as the year before. For example, for the Main Salmon, on October 1st you could apply for off-season dates for the following year.

Good Luck,
Eric Hermann