

Utah's Walk-in Access: An Angler's Perspective



Photo: Little Bear River WIA

The promise and potential of the state's WIA program

Background



- A year researching Walk-in Access for *The Drake*, a quarterly fly-fishing journal, where I'm a senior writer.

- Visited every WIA site (~40) that had moving water, as well as a few flatwaters. Fished about 2/3 and drove ~3,500 miles

- Spoke with ~50 people in Utah — current / former state and elected officials, ranchers, access advocates, conservationists, anglers, businesspeople guides, and officials in Wyoming and Idaho

- Published Summer 2025

Before starting ...



Photo: Darin Jensen, owner of WIA property on Mud Creek

Thank you to:

- Property owners and ranchers who give access
- Officials who have worked to gain access
- Advocates who continue to push for greater access
- Those who want to learn more and play their part

Walk-in Access has abundant potential ...

- Great fishing
- See the state
- Ease of access
- Opportunities for solitude
- Remote adventure



Photo: WIA

... but not always (this) clear on direction ...



Photo: Weber River WIA

Other places that seemed promising ...

The screenshot displays the Utah Wildlife Recreation Access web application. The map shows the Bear Lake Plateau area, with a red circle highlighting a specific land parcel. The information panel on the right provides details for H&B Land Co.

Wildlife UTAH DIVISION OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

H&B Land Co

Description:
2583 acres of land for hunting big game, upland game, and cougar. 2.1 miles of stream access on North Eden Creek.

Primary Purpose or Activity:
hunting and fishing

Seasonal Closure:
property is closed (no hunting access) from February 1 through August 14. Property is open to anglers year-round.

Special Restrictions:
no off road vehicle use. Motorized vehicles are only allowed on public roads that may exist within the property. All use of property is by foot or horseback.

Standard Rules:

- Close any gates you go through
- Obey all posted signs
- NO TARGET SHOOTING
- Park in the designated area(s)
- Pick up all trash (even if it isn't yours)
- No shooting allowed within 600 feet of buildings, houses, livestock or machinery
- Respect this private property

County:
rich

DNR program:
Walk-in Access

Region:
Northern

Species:
Big Game
Mountain Lion
Upland Game

Activities:
--

Leslie McFarlane | Esri, CGIAR, USGS | Lincoln County, WY, Utah Geospatial Resource Center, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGrap...

... led (eventually) to this.



Photo: H&B Cattle Co. — North Eden Creek - WIA

... A few have pretty low visitation numbers

UTAH DNR WILDLIFE RESOURCES

WALK-IN-ACCESS REGISTRATION FORM

ALL SPORTSMEN ENTERING PROPERTY ARE REQUIRED TO SIGN-IN WITH A VALID WIA AUTHORIZATION PERMIT NUMBER

ACTIVITY TYPE: (EX. FISH, HUNT, TRAP)

	DATE	TIME (IN/OUT)	LAST NAME	*WIA AUTHORIZATION PERMIT NUMBER*	ACTIVITY TYPE
1	11-8-20	2:00 pm	Dutton	497160981	Fish
2	11-11-20	2:30 pm	MAYAL	497162719	Fish
3	11-11-20	8:30 AM	Kennel	497161670	Fish
4	1/09/21	11:00 am	Nystrom	990073976	Fish
5	1-9-21	11:00 am	Nystrom	497164419	Fish
6	3-9-21	11:00 am	SANDERSON	497165633	Fish
7	6-20-21	09:49	Heinzelman	497162754	Fish Thank You
8	7/10/21	3:00	Nystrom	990073976	Fish
9	7/10/21	3:00	Nystrom	497164419	Fish
10	7/16/21	4:00 pm	Chrentel		Walk
11	7/30		Yei	497173012	Fish
12	8/11	7:00	Burky	497176555	Fish
13	11/3/21	10:50 am	Higbee	990075324	
14	6/11/22	4:00 pm	Boone	990075325	Walk/Geo
15	"	"	"	"	"
16	10/24/22	3:40	BARNES	497186681	
17	11/16/22	2:30	Trshaw	SOSAD - 70 YEARS OF MEMORIES	Fishing
18	10-10-22	5:00	SHULLER	497188398	Fishing
19	11-17-22	10:00	Garcia	497143128	
20	11-17-22	16:00	Garcia		

Photo: Clover Creek WIA

... and possibly for good reason ...



Photo: Clover Creek WIA

... elsewhere there were obstacles.



Photo: H&B Cattle Co. WIA



Photo: Little Bear River WIA

Some places have easy access and clear directions ...

The screenshot displays the Utah Wildlife Recreation Access website. The left sidebar contains navigation and map controls, including a search bar, map data layers (Land ownership, Species habitat layers, National Park Service lands, DWR hunt layer), basemap change, table view, and about information. The main map area shows a satellite view of the McMichael property, a walk-in access point, and the Weber River. A pop-up window provides details for the McMichael - Walk in access, stating it provides access to 0.52 miles of the Weber River and 125 acres. The right panel contains detailed information for the McMichael property, including a description, primary purpose (Fishing and Hunting), standard rules (NO TARGET SHOOTING, Park in the designated area(s), Pick up all trash, No shooting within 600 feet, Respect private property), county (Summit), DNR program (Walk-in Access), region (Northern), and species (Brown Trout, Cutthroat Trout, Mountain Whitefish, Rainbow Trout, Utah sucker, Waterfowl). Activities listed are Fishing and Hunting, both with descriptions of the property's location southwest of Coalville. The footer includes copyright information for Leslie McFarlane and various data sources.

Services Agencies Search Utah.gov

Wildlife UTAH DIVISION OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Zoom to Close

Search / filter

Add map data layers

Land ownership

Species habitat layers

National Park Service lands

DWR hunt layer

Change basemap

Show table view

About

McMichael - Walk in access

This property provides access to 0.52 miles of the Weber River and 125 acre ...

McMichael

Description:

This property provides access to 0.52 miles of the Weber River and 125 acres of hunting property and is located southwest of Coalville. To access this property, take I-80 exit 162, Coalville, and then turn east into Coalville. At the stop sign on main street head south (turn right) and drive 3.9 miles to Judd Lane. Turn right onto Judd Lane, cross over the freeway and turn right immediately after onto a dirt road that heads north. Park at the end of this road and enter the property over the fence crossover.

Primary Purpose or Activity:

Fishing and Hunting

Standard Rules:

- NO TARGET SHOOTING
- Park in the designated area(s)
- Pick up all trash (even if it isn't yours)
- No shooting allowed within 600 feet of buildings, houses, livestock or machinery
- Respect this private property

County:

Summit

DNR program:

Walk-in Access

Region:

Northern

Species:

Brown Trout
Cutthroat Trout
Mountain Whitefish
Rainbow Trout
Utah sucker
Waterfowl

Activities:

Fishing

Description: This property provides access to 0.52 miles of the Weber River and is located southwest of Coalville.

Hunting

Description: This property provides access to 125 acres of hunting property and is located southwest of Coalville.

Leslie McFarlane | Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA | Esri Community Maps Contributors, Utah Geospatial Resource Center, © OpenStreetMa...

... but you will have plenty of
company



Photo: Weber River/Judd Lane WIA

... but also fun fishing.



Photos: Mud Creek WIA, July 2024

The Weber River: Where WIA began

- The Weber still has some of the best Walk-in Access in the state

- Heavy pressure

- What's its future?

- Concerns it could be sold off



Photo: Weber River/Judd Lane WIA

Public Waters Access Act



- After PWAA, WIA was viewed as potential solution / answer to reduction in stream access mileage.
- State sponsored Utah Waterways Task Force examined this. Utah Legislature also directed UDNR to earmark \$450,000 for WIA.
- UDWR Director at the time testified there were some 500 miles officials believed could be brought into WIA.
- Utah Legislature appropriated \$300,000; there was also \$2.2 million in federal funds earmarked for expansion of WIA, specifically in Southern Utah.

Where we are today with walk-in access?



Photo: Upper Weber WIA

A close-up photograph of a brown trout in a fishing net. The net is white with a black frame and is positioned on a riverbank. The fish is brown with a lighter belly and is looking towards the camera. The background shows a river with water and some rocks.

Takeaways

Photo: Lower Beaver River WIA

- Some good waters: variety of species, healthy fish, adventure, little pressure.
- Other waters: worth a visit or two
- A handful: An option for locals, but not great for travelers.
- Peaked in 2017 with 59 stream miles. General decline since.
- Overall, WIA has been stagnant: budget flat (\$130,000/year, not fully spent), enrolled miles hovering in the 30s-40s, high pressure in the same areas.
- Need for fresh ideas, other properties.

With some options don't seem that great



Photo: Malad River WIA

Southern Utah has the most enrolled miles



Photo: Sevier River WIA

With some great fishing potential



Photos: "AHenrie" Panguitch Creek WIA

Finding these places was a challenge

- Dumb luck: I came across a buried spreadsheet on a forgotten state DWR website that actually had GPS coordinates to these locations.

12:17

Utah_Walk-In_Access_points 3.5.24

1	DisplayName	X	Y	OBJECTID	PropertyID	PointTypeID	OBJECTID	PropertyID
13	ChokeCherry	-113.7314228	-41.55374433	52	(7FD3721C-F357-418C-A7EF-EAC1A92E1F32)	Parking	25	(7FD3721C-F357-418C-A7EF-EAC1A92E1F32)
14	ChokeCherry	-113.7069465	-41.62541277	53	(7FD3721C-F357-418C-A7EF-EAC1A92E1F32)	Parking	25	(7FD3721C-F357-418C-A7EF-EAC1A92E1F32)
15	Triangle Bar	-111.3663315	-41.71473268	56	(FADF3747-33C3-41F8-B078-7AF8C08B3033)	Parking	8835	(FADF3747-33C3-41F8-B078-7AF8C08B3033)
16	L Dahle	-112.0905999	-41.95365696	63	(9EF27118-9AFB-4621-8286-737C6B90BCE1)	Parking	68843	(9EF27118-9AFB-4621-8286-737C6B90BCE1)
17	DPostma	-112.4919859	-41.71727242	64	(8D8489C-AE23-44C6-91E3-ACD01DBECC00)	Parking	10035	(8D8489C-AE23-44C6-91E3-ACD01DBECC00)
18	Pappas	-113.3885549	-40.86313141	70	(113948D0-1787-43FC-A1DC-56954787CE92)	Parking	11238	(113948D0-1787-43FC-A1DC-56954787CE92)
19	HolmesCreek	-111.9171479	-41.07093373	72	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Parking	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
20	HolmesCreek	-111.9164476	-41.07147833	73	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Parking	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
21	HolmesCreek	-111.9157613	-41.07260887	74	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Parking	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
22	HolmesCreek	-111.9142037	-41.07334845	89	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
23	HolmesCreek	-111.9145806	-41.07048223	90	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
24	HolmesCreek	-111.9145999	-41.07027155	91	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
25	HolmesCreek	-111.9154205	-41.07001026	92	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
26	HolmesCreek	-111.9157515	-41.06971566	93	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
27	HolmesCreek	-111.9158685	-41.06945083	94	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
28	HolmesCreek	-111.9143958	-41.07084769	95	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
29	HolmesCreek	-111.9140796	-41.07183393	96	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
30	HolmesCreek	-111.9136355	-41.07215926	97	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
31	HolmesCreek	-111.91336	-41.07259648	98	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
32	HolmesCreek	-111.9131668	-41.07304617	99	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
33	HolmesCreek	-111.9130773	-41.07333979	100	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)	Buoy line	10039	(49CC128C-057A-428D-8678-C2C37D382BA2)
34	JBaxter	-111.8900152	-41.5824033	101	(D198E1F6-EE72-4834-8A8C-A058217A768A)	Parking	12035	(D198E1F6-EE72-4834-8A8C-A058217A768A)
35	Shovanna	-112.8637052	-41.25494438	103	(8C3D2F38-1816-495A-429F-0D8068D1E78)	Parking	12838	(8C3D2F38-1816-495A-429F-0D8068D1E78)
36	Shovanna	-112.8637052	-41.25497955	104	(8C3D2F38-1816-495A-429F-0D8068D1E78)	Parking	12838	(8C3D2F38-1816-495A-429F-0D8068D1E78)
37	Stewart	-111.4948151	-41.0184125	115	(079D8ED1-923E-471A-8940-16D1864E971C)	Parking	13837	(079D8ED1-923E-471A-8940-16D1864E971C)

What's the road ahead?



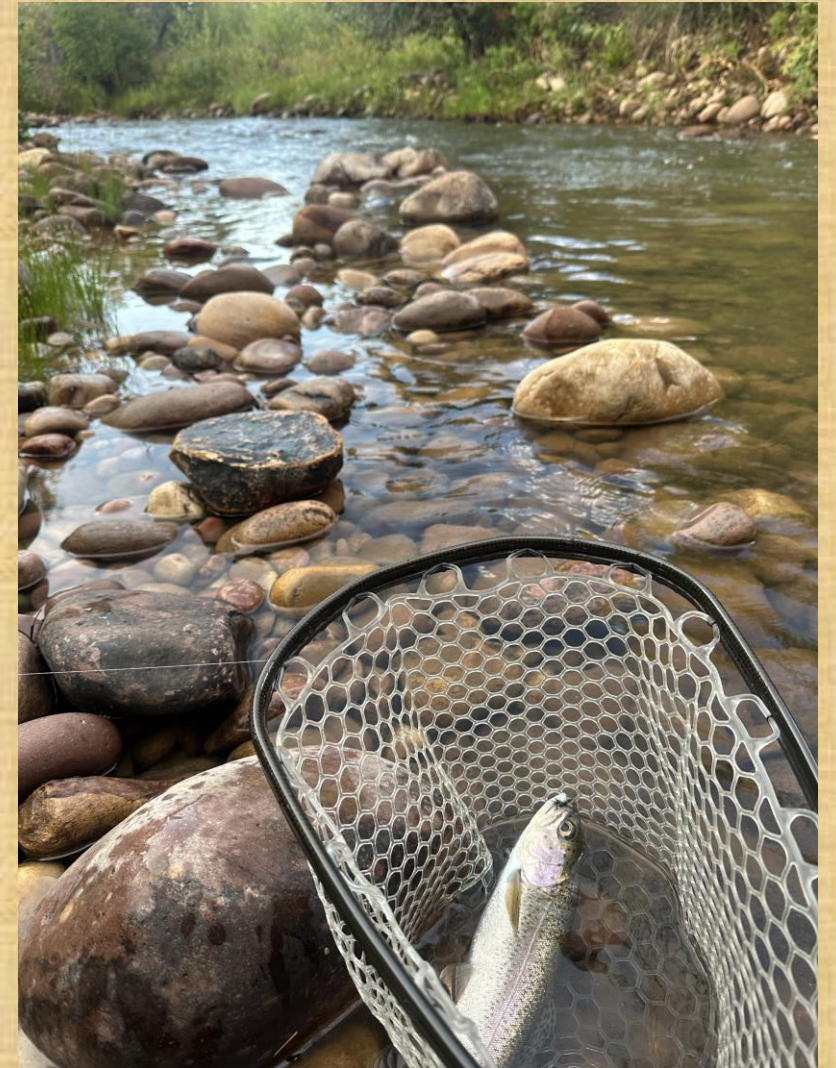
Photo: Road to H&B Land Co WIA/North Eden Creek

Is Walk-in Access Doomed?



Photo: Weber River WIA.

Or is there new potential?



Photos: Lake Fork Creek WIA

What about those 500 miles?

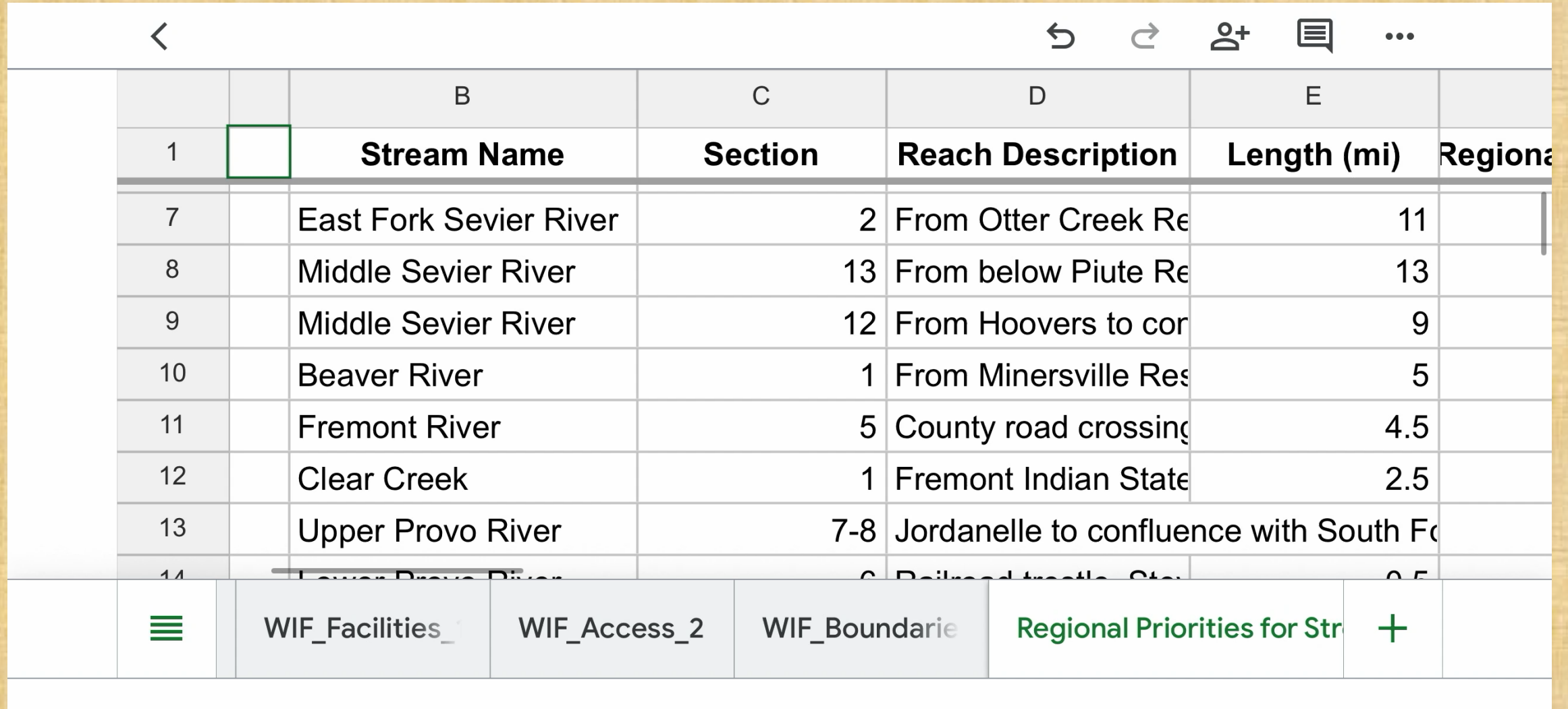


Weber River

(est. 71 miles, 6 stream areas, many landowners)



481.5 miles



The image shows a Google Sheets spreadsheet with a table of stream data. The table has the following columns: Stream Name, Section, Reach Description, Length (mi), and Region. The data is as follows:

	B	C	D	E	
1	Stream Name	Section	Reach Description	Length (mi)	Region
7	East Fork Sevier River	2	From Otter Creek Re	11	
8	Middle Sevier River	13	From below Piute Re	13	
9	Middle Sevier River	12	From Hoovers to cor	9	
10	Beaver River	1	From Minersville Res	5	
11	Fremont River	5	County road crossing	4.5	
12	Clear Creek	1	Fremont Indian State	2.5	
13	Upper Provo River	7-8	Jordanelle to confluence with South Fc		
14	Lower Provo River	6	Railroad trestle Sta	0.5	

At the bottom of the spreadsheet, there is a navigation bar with the following tabs: WIF_Facilities_1, WIF_Access_2, WIF_Boundarie, Regional Priorities for Str, and a plus sign (+).

How Other States Manage Walk-in Access

Wyoming

- 2x-3x number of stream miles.
- Doesn't advertise pay rates to landowners.
- Also facing competition.
- Paid \$1.3 million in 2024 for hunting and fishing access leases.



Idaho

- Does annual evaluation of properties to determine best options.
- Reviewed by panel of experts.
- Allows for market rates, but not bidding wars.
- Spent \$600,000 in 2025.

Angler Responsibilities



Sign up
(and sign
in)



Read up



Clean up

