



United
States
Department
of
Agriculture

Rockhounding, Prospecting, and Fossil Hunting on the Pike - San Isabel National Forests, Cimarron - Comanche National Grasslands (PSICC)



Your national forests and grasslands are a great place to experience a wide range of recreational opportunities. Prospecting, rockhounding, and fossil hunting are among the many outdoor pursuits visitors enjoy on the PSICC.

What is prospecting, rockhounding, and fossil hunting?

Rockhounding involves the searching and collection of small quantities of common variety rocks, gems, or other geologic materials for personal use or enjoyment.

Prospecting is searching for valuable minerals. This can range from collecting hand samples of mineralized rock and gold panning, to using metal detectors and operating small non-motorized sluices as long as they "do not cause significant surface disturbance" 36 CFR 228.4a(1)(iv).

Forest Service mining regulations listed at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 228, Subpart A and C, govern prospecting and rockhounding activities.

Fossil hunting allows the collection of petrified wood, invertebrate and plant fossils for personal use. Invertebrate fossils, such as clams, do not have an internal skeleton. Collection of vertebrate (has internal skeleton) fossils requires a permit (36 CFR 261.9i). The rules for petrified wood collection are found under 36 CFR 228, Subpart C.

Be advised that unauthorized collection of archaeological artifacts, such as arrowheads, old bottles, other historic artifacts etc. is prohibited on National Forest lands.

How can I determine if a permit is required for my forest activities?

Prospecting, rockhounding, petrified wood, and invertebrate and plant fossil hunting usually do not require a permit when there is little or no disturbance to the ground, other resources, and environment. Check with the local ranger district if you have questions on whether a permit may be needed. For example, a free use permit may be required for removal of mineral materials. A Notice Of Intent (NOI) for prospecting activities which might cause significant disturbance should be submitted to the District Ranger. In part, this means if you plan to:

- Use explosives
- Use power equipment for excavation
- Drive vehicles off public roads or trails
- Clear or remove vegetation
- Store petroleum products or other hazardous or flammable material near streams

Based on the complexity (or scope) of your proposal as stated in the NOI, a Plan of Operation may be required. Forest users should be sensitive to how their activities affect the environment. Rockhounds and prospectors need to carefully refill and vegetate any excavation, no matter how small.

Water quality and fish habitat are critical concerns on national forests and grasslands, so activities in or near streams must be handled with special care. Consideration should also be given to possible cumulative effects when you do the same activity year after year in the same place.

Any sale or commercial use of petrified wood found on lands administered by the Forest Service requires a permit. A free use permit is required for amateur collectors and scientists to take limited quantities for personal use.

Are all national forest lands available for prospecting?

NO. Some areas may be excluded, even from non-commercial activities. Examples include:

- Wild and Scenic River corridors
(e.g. South Platte River below Elevenmile Reservoir)
- Historical or archaeological sites
- Campgrounds
- Wilderness Areas
- Administrative sites
- Areas "withdrawn" from mineral entry (e.g. Pikes Peak)



In addition, you should not work on someone else's "mining claim" without permission. Claimants have rights to valuable mineral deposits on those sites. Claim information can also be found at <https://reports.blm.gov/reports/MLRS>.

Are there any special restrictions that apply to suction dredging?

State and federal permits may be required. Please contact the State of Colorado, Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety (DRMS) or review the following website which has more information related to state guidelines: <https://mining.state.co.us/SiteCollectionDocuments/SuctionDredges.pdf>.

Also, because of the potential effects to streams and fish habitat from suction dredging activities, a NOI should be submitted to the appropriate District Ranger to determine if a plan of operations is necessary.

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The Forest Service regulations apply even if you are a member of a group, such as the of Gold Prospectors Assn. of America. In Colorado waterways, your NOI will only apply to the specific area you designate and the actual dates you propose to the agencies.

Where should I go to enjoy prospecting, rockhounding, and fossil hunting on the national forests?

The PSICC does not have formally designated mineral collecting areas. However, local groups and rock shops can provide more information. There are also several books on rockhounding in Colorado.

Fossils vary in abundance depending on the age of the rocks exposed at the surface. Check with the Forest Service offices listed for geologic and fossil information.

For safety reasons, do not go into abandoned mines!



General Guidelines for Mining and Ground Disturbance on Land Managed by the PSICC

If your Operation:	You will need:	From
Will cause little or no surface disturbance (e.g., gold panning, hand sluicing, metal detecting, and fossil hunting).	No permit or Notice of Intent is needed — although some restriction may apply depending on the area. Check with the Ranger District.	Forest Service
Will involve collecting less than 10 cubic yards of flag-stone, rubble, sand, gravel, or similar material by hand for personal (noncommercial)	A Free-Use Permit for the mineral material is needed. Check with the Ranger District.	Forest Service
Uses a small sluice or rocker box.	May require a Notice of Intent May require a Notice of Intent	Forest Service DRMS
Uses motorized earth moving equipment and/or will likely cause significant surface disturbance.	Plan of Operations Reclamation Permit Other federal and state permits might apply	Forest Service DRMS
Uses a suction dredge.	Plan of Operation Other federal and state permits might apply	Forest Service

**Depending on location land ownership, and scope of operations, a Notice of Intent could be elevated by the District Ranger to a Plan of Operations and which could lead to an environmental analysis, involvement of additional agencies, and/or additional permits.*

Where do I go for more information?

The best way to ensure a bright future for recreational prospecting, rockhounding, and fossil collecting on public lands is to comply with state and federal regulations. Start by bringing your questions or concerns to any appropriate agency in the area you plan to work. Call one of the District Offices below to get connected with the appropriate ranger district or to get copies of the Code of Federal Regulations that apply.

Leadville Ranger District 810 Front Street Leadville, CO 80461 (719) 486-0749	San Carlos Ranger District 3028 East Main Street Canon City, CO 81212 (719) 269-8500	South Park Ranger District 320 Highway 285, P.O. Box 219 Fairplay, CO 80440 (719) 836-2031	Cimarron National Grassland 242 East Highway 56 Elkhart, KS 67950 (620) 697-4621
Salida Ranger District 5575 Cleora Road Salida, CO 81201 (719) 539-3591	Pikes Peak Ranger District 601 South Weber Street Colorado Springs, CO 80903 (719) 636-1602	South Platte Ranger District 30403 Kings Valley Dr, Suite 2-115 Conifer, CO 80433 (303) 275-5610	Comanche National Grassland 27204 Highway 287/ P.O. Box 127 Springfield, CO 67950 (719) 523-6591
PSICC Supervisor's Office 2840 Kachina Drive Pueblo, CO 81008 (719) 553-1400	State of Colorado, DRMS 1313 Sherman Street, #215 Denver, CO 80203 (303) 866-3567	Bureau of Land Management 3028 East Main Street Canon City, CO 81212 (719) 269-8500	

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